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MERIOT'S CHOICE

Rosa N. Carey





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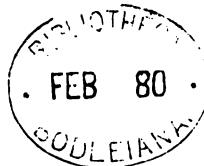
A Tale

BY

ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF

"NELLIE'S MEMORIES," "WOODE AND MARRIED," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. II

LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

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ERRATUM.

Page 120, 3rd Stanza, 2nd line, *for ease read care.*

HERIOT'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUTHFUL DRACO AND SOLON.

“ But thoughtless words may bear a sting
Where malice hath no place,
May wake to pain some secret sting
Beyond thy power to trace.
When quivering lips, and flushing cheek,
The spirit's agony bespeak,
Then, though thou deem thy brother weak,
Yet soothe his soul to peace.”—*S. A. Storrs.*

THINGS certainly seemed at sixes and sevens, as Roy phrased it, the next morning. The severe emotions of the previous night had resulted in Olive's case in a miserable sick headache, which would not permit her to raise her head from the pillow. Mildred, who had rightly interpreted the meaning of the wistful glance that followed her to the door, had resolved to take the first opportunity of speaking to her nephews separately, and

endeavouring to soften their aggrieved feelings towards their sister; by a species of good fortune she met Roy coming out of his father's room.

Roy had slept off his mighty mood, and kicked away his sullenness, and an hour of Polly's sunshiny influence had restored him to good humour; and though his brow clouded a little at his aunt's first words, and he broke into a bar of careless whistling in a low and displeased key at the notion of her mediation, yet his better feelings were soon wrought upon by a hint of Olive's sufferings, and he consented, though a little condescendingly, to be the bearer of his own embassage of peace.

Olive's heavy eyes filled up with tears when she saw him.

"Dear Rex, this is so kind."

"I am sorry your head is so bad, Livy," was the evasive answer, in a sort of good-natured growl. Roy thought it would not do to be too amiable at first. "'You do look precious bad, to be sure,' as the hangman said to the gentleman he afterwards throttled. Take my advice, Livy," seating himself astride the rocking-chair, and speaking confidentially, "medlars, spelt with either vowel, are very rotten things, and though I would not joke for worlds on such an occasion, it behoves us to stick

to our national proverbs, and, as you know as well as I, a burnt child dreads the fire."

"I will try to remember, Rex; I will, indeed; but please make Cardie think I meant it for the best."

"It was the worst possible best," replied Roy, gravely, "and shows what weak understandings you women have—part of the present company excepted, Aunt Milly. 'Age before honesty,' and all that sort of thing, you know."

"You incorrigible boy, how dare you be so rude?"

"Don't distress the patient, Aunt Milly. What a weak-eyed sufferer you look, Livy—regularly down in the doleful doldrums. You must have a strong dose of Polly to cheer you up—a grain of quicksilver for every scruple."

Olive smiled faintly. "Oh, Rex, you dear old fellow, are you sure you forgive me?"

"Very much, thank you," returned Roy, with a low bow from the rocking-chair. "And shall be much obliged by your not mentioning it again."

"Only one word, just—"

"Hush," in a stentorian whisper, "on your peril not an utterance—not the ghostly semblance of a word. Aunt Milly, is repentance always such a painful and distressing disorder? Like the im-

mortal Rosa Dartle, ‘I only ask for information.’ I will draw up a diagnosis of the symptoms for the benefit of all the meddlesome Mattys of futurity—No, you are right, Livy,” as a sigh from Olive reached him; “she was not a nice character in polite fiction, wasn’t Matty—and then show it to Dr. John. Let me see; symptoms, weak eyes and reddish lids, a pallid exterior, with black lines and circles under the eyes, not according to Euclid—or Cocker—a tendency to laugh nervously at the words of wisdom, which, the conscience reprobating, results in an imbecile grin.”

“Oh, Rex, do—please don’t—my head does ache so—and I don’t want to laugh.”

“All hysteria, and a fresh attack of scruples—that quicksilver must be administered without delay, I see—hot and cold fits—aguish symptoms, and a tendency to incoherence and extravagance, not to say lightheadedness—nausea, excited by the very thought of Dr. Murray—and a restless desire to misplace words—‘do—please don’t,’ being a fair sample. I declare, Livy, the disease is as novel as it is interesting.”

Mildred left Olive cheered in spite of herself, but with a fresh access of pain, and went in search of Richard.

He was sitting at the little table writing. He looked up rather moodily as his aunt entered.

"Breakfast seems late this morning, Aunt Milly. Where is Rex?"

"I left him in Olive's room, my dear;" and as Richard frowned, "Olive has been making herself ill with crying, and has a dreadful headache, and Roy was kind enough to go and cheer her up."

No answer, only the scratching of the quill-pen rapidly traversing the paper.

Mildred stood irresolute for a moment and watched him; there was no softening of the fine young face. Chriss was right when she said Richard's lips closed as though they were iron.

"I was sorry to hear what an uncomfortable evening you all had last night, Richard. I should hardly have enjoyed myself, if I had known how things were at home."

"Ignorance is bliss, sometimes. I am glad you had a pleasant evening, Aunt Milly. I was sorry I could not meet you. I told Rex to go."

"I found Rex kicking up his heels in the porch instead. Never mind," as Richard looked annoyed. "Dr. Heriot brought me home. But, Richard, dear, I am more sorry than I can say about this sad misunderstanding between you and Olive."

“Aunt Milly, excuse me, but the less said about that the better.”

“Poor girl! I know how her interference has offended you; it was ill-judged, but, indeed, it was well meant. You have no conception, Richard, how dearly Olive loves you.”

The pen remained poised above the paper a moment, and then, in spite of his effort, the pent-up storm burst forth.

“Interference! unwarrantable impertinence! How dare she betray me to my father?”

“Betray you, Richard?”

“The very thing I was sparing him! The thing of all others I would not have had him know for worlds! How did she know? What right had she to guess my most private feelings? It is past all forbearance; it is enough to disgust one.”

“It is hard to bear, certainly; but, Richard, the fault is after all a trifling one; the worst construction one can put on it is error of judgment and a simple want of tact; she had no idea she was harming you.”

“Harming me!” still more stormily; “I shall never get over it. I have lost caste in my father’s opinion; how will he be ever able to trust me now? If she had but given me warning of her

intention, I should not be in this position. All these months of labour gone for nothing. Questioned, treated as a child—but, were he twenty times my father, I should refuse to be catechised;” and Richard took up his pen again, and went on writing, but not before Mildred had seen positive tears of mortification had sprung to his eyes. They made her feel softer to him—such a lad, too—and motherless—and yet so hard and impracticable—mannish, indeed !

She stooped over him, even venturing to lay a hand on his shoulder. “ Dear Cardie, if you feel she has injured you so seriously, there is all the greater need of forgiveness. You cannot refuse it to one so truly humble. She is already heart-broken at the thought she may have caused mischief.”

“ Are you her ambassadress, Aunt Milly ? ”

“ No ; you know your sister better. She would not have ventured—at least—— ”

“ I thought not,” he returned coldly. “ I wish her no ill, but, I confess, I am hardly in the mood for true forgiveness just now. You see I am no saint, Aunt Milly,” with a sneer, that sat ill on the handsome, care-worn young face, “ and I am above playing the hypocrite. Tender messages are not in

my line, and I am sorry to say I have not Roy's forgiving temper."

"Dear Rex, he is a pattern to us all," thought Mildred, but she wisely forbore making the irritating comparison; it would certainly not have lightened Richard's dark mood. With an odd sort of tenacity he seemed dwelling on his aunt's last words.

"You are wrong in one thing, Aunt Milly. I do not know my sister. I know Rex, and love him with all my heart; and I understand the foolish baby Chriss, but Olive is to me simply an enigma."

"Because you have not attempted to solve her."

"Most enigmas are tiresome, and hardly worth the trouble of solving," he returned calmly.

"Richard! your own sister! for shame!" indignantly from Mildred.

"I cannot help it, Aunt Milly; Olive has always been perfectly incomprehensible to me. She is the worst sister, and, as far as I can judge, the worst daughter I ever knew. In my opinion she has simply no heart."

"Perhaps I had better leave you, Richard; you are not quite yourself."

The quiet reproof in Mildred's gentlest tones seemed to touch him.

"I am sorry if I grieve you, Aunt Milly. I wish myself that we had never entered on this subject."

"I wish it with all my heart, Richard; but I had no idea my own nephew could be so hard."

"Unhappiness and want of sympathy makes a man hard, Aunt Milly. But, all the same," speaking with manifest effort, "I am making a bad return for your kindness."

"I wish you would let me be kind," she returned, earnestly. "Nay, my dear boy," as an impatient frown crossed his face, "I am not going to renew a vexed subject. I love Olive too well to have her unjustly censured, and you are too prejudiced and blinded by your own troubles to be capable of doing her justice. I only want"—here Mildred paused and faltered—"remember the bruised reed, Richard, and the mercy promised to the merciful. When we come to our last hour, Cardie, and our poor little life-torch is about to be extinguished, I think we shall be thankful if no greater sins are written up against us than want of tact and the error of judgment that comes from over-conscientiousness and a too great love;" and without looking

at his face, or trusting herself to say more, Mildred turned to the breakfast-table, where he shortly afterwards joined her.

Olive was in such a suffering condition all the morning, that she needed her aunt's tenderest attention, and Mildred did not see her brother till later in the day.

The reaction caused by "the Royal magnanimity," as Mildred phrased it to Dr. Heriot afterwards, had passed into subsequent depression as the hours passed on, and no message reached her from the brother she loved but too well. Mildred feigned for a long time not to notice the weary, wistful looks that followed her about the room, especially as she knew Olive's timidity would not venture on direct questioning, but the sight of tears stealing from under the closed lids caused her to relent. Roy's prescription of quicksilver had wholly failed. Polly, saddened and mystified by the sorrowful spectacle of three-piled woe, forgot all her saucy speeches, and blundered over her sympathising ones. And Chrissy was even worse ; she clattered about the room in her little clogs, and talked loudly in the crossest possible key about people being stupid enough to have feelings and make themselves ill about nothing. Chriss soon got her dismissal,

but as Mildred returned a little flushed from the summary ejectment which Chriss had playfully tried to dispute, she stooped over the bed and whispered—

“Never mind, dear, it could not be helped ; has it made your head worse ?”

“Only a little. Chriss is always so noisy.”

“Shall we have Polly back ? she is quieter and more accustomed to sick-rooms.”

“No, thank you, I like being alone with you best, Aunt Milly, only—” here a large tear dropped on the coverlid.

“You must not fret then, or your nurse will scold. No, indeed, Olive. I know what you are thinking about, but I don’t know that having you ill on my hands will greatly mend matters.”

“Cardie,” whispered Olive, unable to endure the suspense any longer, “did you give him my message ?”

“I told him you were far from well ; but you know as well as I do, Olive, that there is no dealing with Cardie when he is in one of these unreasonable moods ; we must be patient and give him time.”

“I know what you mean, Aunt Milly—you think he will never forgive me.”

"I think nothing of the kind; you must not be so childish, Olive," returned Mildred, with a little wholesome severity. "I wish you would be a good sensible girl and go to sleep."

"I will try," she returned, in a tone of languid obedience; "but I have such an ache here," pressing her hand to her heart, "such an odd sort of sinking, not exactly pain. I think it is more unhappiness and——"

"That is because the mind acts and re-acts on the body; you must quiet yourself, Olive, and put this unlucky misunderstanding out of your thoughts. Remember, after all, who it is 'who maketh men to be of one mind in a house;' you have acted for the best and without any selfish motives, and you may safely leave the disentangling of all this difficulty to Him. No, you must not talk any more," as Olive seemed eager to speak, "you are flushed and feverish, and I mean to read you to sleep with my monotonous voice;" and in spite of the invalid's incredulous look Mildred so far kept her word that Olive first lost whole sentences, and then vainly tried to fix her attention on others, and at last thought she was in Hill-beck woods and that some doves were cooing loudly to her, at which point Mildred softly laid down the book and stole from the room.

As she stood for a moment by the lobby window she saw her brother was taking his evening's stroll in the churchyard, and hastened to join him. He quickened his steps on seeing her and inquired anxiously after Olive.

"She is asleep now, but I have not thought her looking very well for the last two or three days," answered his sister. "I do not think Olive is as strong as the others, she flags sadly at times."

"All this has upset her; they have told you, I suppose, Mildred?"

"Olive told me last night."

"I do not know that I have ever received a greater shock except one. I hardly had an idea myself how much my hopes were fixed upon that boy, but I am doomed to disappointment."

"It seems to me he is scarcely to be blamed; think how young he is, only nineteen, and with such abilities."

"Poor lad; if he only knew how little I blame him," returned his father with a groan. "It only shows the amount of culpable neglect of which I have been guilty, throwing him into the society of such a man; but indeed I was not aware till lately that Macdonald was little better than a free-thinker."

Mildred looked shocked, things were even worse than she thought.

" I fancy he has drifted into extremes during the last year or two, for though always a little slippery in his Church views, he had not developed any decided rationalistic tendency, but Betha, poor darling, always disliked him ; she said once, I remember, that he was not a good companion for our boys. I do not think she mentioned Richard in particular."

" Olive told me she had."

" Perhaps so ; she was always so keenly alive to what concerned him. He was my only rival, Milly," with a sad smile. " No mother could have been prouder of her boy than she was of Cardie. I am bound to say he deserved it, for he was a good son to her ; at least," with a stifled sigh, " he did not withhold his confidence from his mother."

" You found him impracticable then, Arnold ? "

He shook his head sadly.

" The sin lies on my own head, Milly. I have neglected my children, buried myself in my own pursuits and sorrow, and now I am sorely punished. My son refuses the confidence which his father actually stooped to entreat," and there was a look of such suppressed anguish on Mr. Lambert's face that Mildred could hardly refrain from tears.

“Richard is always so good to you,” she said at last.

“Do I not tell you I blame myself and not the boy that there is this barrier between us! but to know that my son is in trouble which he will not permit me to share, it is very hard, Mildred.”

“It is wrong, Arnold.”

“Where has the lad inherited his proud spirit? his mother was so very gentle, and I was always alive to reason. I must confess he was perfectly respectful, not to say filial in his manner, was grieved to distress me, would have suffered anything rather than I should have been so harassed; but it was not his fault that people had meddled in his private concerns; you would have thought he was thirty at least.”

“I am sure he meant what he said; there is no want of heart in Richard.”

“He tried to smoothe me over, I could see, hoped that I should forget it, and would esteem it a favour if I would not make it a matter of discussion between us. He had been a little unsettled, how much he refused to say. He could wish with me that he had never been thrown so much with Macdonald, as doubts take seed as rapidly as thistle-down; but when I urged and pressed him to repose

his doubts in me, as I might possibly remove them, he drew back and hesitated, said he was not prepared, he would rather not raise questions for which there might not be sufficient reply; he thought it better to leave the weeds in a dark corner where they could trouble no one; he wished to work it out for himself—in fact, implied that he did not want my help."

"I think you must have misunderstood him, Arnold. Who could be better than his own father, and he a clergyman?"

"Many, my dear; Heriot, for example. I find Heriot is not quite so much in the dark as I supposed, though he treats it less seriously than we do; he says it is no use forcing confidence, and that Cardie is peculiar and resents being catechised, and he advises me to send him to Oxford without delay, that he may meet men on his own level and rub against other minds, but I feel loth to do so, I am so in the dark about him. Heriot may be right, or it may be the worst possible thing."

"What did Richard say himself?"

"He seemed relieved at my proposing it, thanked me, and jumped at the idea, begged that he might go after Christmas; he was wasting his time here, looked pleased and dubious when I proposed his

reaching for the bar, and then his face fell ; I suppose at the thought of my disappointment, for he coloured and said hurriedly that there was no need of immediate decision ; he must make up his mind finally whether he should ever take holy orders. At present it was more than probable that——

“ ‘ Say at once it is impossible,’ I interrupted, for the thought of such sacrilege made me angry. ‘ No, father, do not say that,’ he returned, and I fancied he was touched for the moment. ‘ Don’t make up your mind that we are both to disappoint you. I only want to be perfectly sure that I am no hypocrite, that, at any rate I am true in what I do. I think she would like that best, father,’ and then I knew he meant his mother.”

“ Dear Arnold, I am not sure after all that you need be unhappy about your boy.”

“ I do not distrust his rectitude of purpose, I only grieve over his pride and inflexibility, they are not good bosom-companions to a young man. Well, wherever he goes he is sure of his father’s prayers, though it is hard to know that one’s son is a stranger. Ah, there comes Heriot, Milly. I suppose he thinks we all want cheering up, as it is not his usual night.”

Mildred had already guessed such was the case,
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and was very grateful for the stream of ready talk that, at supper-time, carried Polly and Chriss with it. Roy had recovered his spirits, but he seemed to consider it a duty to preserve a subdued and injured exterior in his father's presence ; it showed remorse for past idleness and was a delicate compliment to the absent Livy ; while Richard sat by in grave taciturnity, now and then breaking out into short sentences when silence was impossible, but all the time keenly cognisant of his father's every look and movement and observant of his every want.

Dr. Heriot followed Mildred out of the room with a half-laughing inquiry how she had fared during the family gale.

"It is no laughing matter, I assure you ; we are all as uncomfortable as possible."

"When Greek meets Greek, you know the rest. You have no idea how dogmatical and disagreeable Mr. Lambert can make himself at times."

This was a new idea to Mildred and was met with unusual indignation.

"Parents have a notion they can enforce confidence, that the very relationship instils it. Here is the vicar groaning over his son's unfilial reticence and breaking his heart over a fit of very youthful

stubbornness which calls itself manly pride, and Richard all the while yearning after his father, but bitter at being treated and schooled like a child. I declare I take Richard's part in this."

" You ought not to blame my brother," returned Mildred in a low voice.

" He blames himself, and rightly too. He had no business to have such a man about the house. Richard is a cantankerous puppy not to confide in his father. But what's the good of leading a horse to the water?—you can't make him drink."

" I begin to think you are right about Richard," sighed Mildred, " one cannot help being fond of him, but he is very unsatisfactory. I am afraid I shall never make any impression."

" Then no one will. Fie! Miss Lambert, I detect a whole world of disappointment in that sigh. What has become of your faith? Half Dick's faultiness comes from having an old head on young shoulders; in my opinion he's worth half a dozen Penny-royals rolled in one."

" Dr. Heriot, how can you! Rex has the sweetest disposition in the world. I strongly suspect he is his father's favourite."

" Have you just found that out? It would have done you good to have seen the vicar gloating over

Roy's daubs this afternoon, as though they were treasures of art; the rogue actually made him believe that his coffee-coloured clouds, with ragged vermillion edges, were sublime effects. I quite pleased him when I assured him they were supernatural in the truest sense of the word. He wiped his eyes actually, over the gipsy sibyl that I call Roy's gingerbread queen. What a rage the lad put himself in when I said I had never seen such a golden complexion except at a fair booth or in very bad cases of jaundice."

"How you do delight to tease that boy!"

"Isn't it too bad—ruffling the wings of my 'sweet Whistler,' as I call him. He is the sort of boy all you women spoil. He only wants a little more petting to become as effeminate as heart can wish. I don't know but what I shall miss his bright face when a London studio engulfs him."

"You think my brother will give him his way, then?"

"He has no choice. Besides, he quite believes he has an unfledged Claude Lorraine or Salvator Rosa on his hands. I believe Polly's Dad Fabian is to be asked, and the matter regularly discussed. Poor Lambert! he will suffer a twinge or two before he delivers the boy into the hands of the Bohemians.

He turned quite pale when I hinted a year in Rome ; but there seems no reason why Roy should not have a regular artistic education ; and, after all, I believe the lad has some talent—some of his smaller sketches are very spirited."

"I thought so myself," replied Mildred ; and the subject of their conversation appearing at this moment the topic was dropped.

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD CŒUR-DE-LION.

“ What is life, father ? ”

“ A battle, my child,
Where the strongest lance may fail ;
Where the wariest eyes may be beguiled,
And the stoutest heart may quail ;
Where the foes are gathered on every hand
And rest not day or night,
And the feeble little ones must stand
In the thickest of the fight.”

Adelaide Anne Proctor.

THE next day the vicarage had not regained its wonted atmosphere of quiet cheerfulness, which had been its normal condition since Mildred's arrival.

In vain had “ the sweet Whistler” haunted the narrow lobby outside Olive's room, where, with long legs dangling from the window-seat, he had warbled through the whole of “ Bonnie Dundee ” and “ Comin' thro' the Rye,” after which, helping himself *ad libitum* from the old-fashioned book-case outside Mildred's chamber, he had read through

the whole index of the *Shepherd's Guide* with a fine nasal imitation of Farmer Tallentire.

“ Roy, how can you be so absurd ? ”

“ Shut up, Contradiction ; don’t you see I am enlightening Aunt Milly’s mind—clearing it of London fogs ? Always imbibe the literature of your country. People living on the fell-side will find this a useful handbook of reference, containing ‘ a proper delineation of the usual horn and ear-marks of all the members’ sheep, extending from Bowes and Wensleydale to Sedbergh in Yorkshire, from Ravenstone-dale and Brough to Gillumholme in Westmorland, from Crossfell and Kirkoswold—— ’ ”

Here Chriss falling upon the book the drawling monotone was quenched, and a sharp scuffle ensued, in which Sauce Royal made his escape, betaking himself during the remainder of the day to his glass studio and the society of congenial canaries.

The day was intensely hot ; Olive’s headache had yielded at last to Mildred’s treatment, but she seemed heavy and languid and dragged herself with difficulty to the dinner-table, shocking every one but Richard with her altered appearance.

Richard had so far recovered his temper that he had made up his mind with some degree of magnanimity to ignore (at least outwardly) what

had occurred. He kissed Olive coolly when she entered, and hoped, somewhat stiffly, that her head was better ; but he took no notice of the yearning look in the dark eyes raised to his, though it haunted him long afterwards, neither did he address her again, and Mildred was distressed to find that Olive scarcely touched her food, and at last crept away before half the meal was over, with the excuse that her head was aching again, but in reality unable to bear the chill restraint of her brother's presence.

Mildred found her giddy and confused and yet unwilling to own herself anything but well, and with a growing sense of despondency and hopelessness that made her a trying companion for a hot afternoon. She talked Mildred and herself into a state of drowsiness at last, from which the former was roused by hearing Ethel Trelawny's voice on the terrace below.

Mildred was thankful for any distraction, and the sight of the tall figure in the riding-habit, advancing so gracefully to meet her, was especially refreshing, though Ethel accosted her with unusual gravity, and hoped she would not be in the way.

" Papa has ridden over to Appleby, and will call for me on his return. I started with the intention

of going with him, but the afternoon is so oppressive that I repented of my determination ; will you give me a cup of tea instead, Mildred ? ”

“ Willingly,” was the cheerful answer ; and as she gave the order, Ethel seated herself on the steps leading down to the small smooth-shaven croquet-lawn, and doffing her hat and gauntlets, amused herself with switching the daisy-heads with her jewelled riding-whip until Mildred returned.

“ Is Olive better ? ” she asked abruptly, as Mildred seated herself beside her with needlework.

Mildred looked a little surprised as she answered, but a delicately-worded question or two soon showed her that Ethel was not entirely ignorant of the state of the case. She had met Richard in the town on the previous day, and, startled at his gloomy looks, had coaxed him, though with great difficulty, to accompany her home.

“ It was not very easy to manage him in such a mood,” continued Ethel, with her crisp laugh. “ I felt, as we were going up the Crofts, as though I were Una leading her lion. He was dumb all the way ; he contrived a roar at the end, though—we were very nearly having our first quarrel.”

“ I am afraid you were hard on your knight then.”

Ethel coloured a little disdainfully, but she coloured nevertheless.

"Boys were not knighted in the old days, Mildred—they had to win their spurs, though," hesitating, "few could boast of a more gallant exploit perhaps;" but with a sudden sparkle of fun in her beautiful eyes, "a lionised Richard, not a Cœur-de-Lion, but the horrid, blatant beast himself, must be distressful to any one but a Una."

"Poor Richard! you should have soothed instead of irritated him."

"Counter-irritants are good for some diseases; besides, it was his own fault. He did not put me in possession of the real facts of the case until the last, and then only scantily. When I begged to know more, he turned upon me quite haughtily; it might have been Cœur-de-Lion himself before Ascalon, when Berengaria chose to be inquisitive. Indeed he gave me a strong hint that I could have no possible right to question him at all. I felt inclined half saucily to curtsey to his mightiness, only he looked such a sore-hearted Cœur-de-Lion."

"I like your choice of names; it fits Cardie somehow. I believe the lion-hearted king could contrive to get into rages sometimes. If I were

mischievous, which I am not, I would not let you forget you have likened yourself to Berengaria."

It was good to see the curl of Ethel's lips as she completely ignored Mildred's speech.

"I suppressed the mocking reverence and treated him to a prettily-worded apology instead, which had the effect of bringing him 'off the stilts,' as a certain doctor calls it. I tell him sometimes, by way of excuse, that the teens are a stilted period in one's life."

"Do you mean that you are younger than Richard?"

"I am three months his junior, as he takes care to remind me sometimes. Did you ever see youth treading on the heels of bearded age as in Richard's case, poor fellow? I am really very sorry for him," she continued, in a tone of such genuine feeling that Mildred liked her better than ever.

"I hope you told him so."

"Yes, I was very good to him when I saw my sarcasms hurt. I gave him tea with my own fair hands, and was very plentiful in the matter of cream, which I know to be his weakness; and I made Minto pet him and Lassie jump up on his knee, and by and by my good temper was rewarded, and 'Richard was himself again!'"

"Did he tell you he is going to Oxford after Christmas?"

"Yes; I am thankful to hear it. What is the good of his rusting here, when every one says he has such wonderful abilities? I hope you do not think me wrong, Mildred," blushing slightly, "but I strongly advocated his reading for the Bar."

Mildred sighed.

"There is no doubt he wishes it above all things; he quite warmed into eagerness as we discussed it. My father has always said that his clear logical head and undoubted talents would be invaluable as a barrister. He has no want of earnestness, but he somehow lacks the persuasive eloquence that ought to be innate in the real priest; and yet when I said as much he shook his head, and relapsed into sadness again, said there was more than that, hinted at a rooted antipathy, then turned it off by owning that he disliked the notion of talking to old women about their souls; was sure he would be a cypher at a sick-bed, good for nothing but scolding the people all round, and thought writing a couple of sermons a week the most wearisome work in the world—digging into one's brains for dry matter that must not be embellished even by a few harmless Latin and Greek quotations."

Mildred looked grave. "I fear he dislikes the whole thing."

But Ethel interposed eagerly. "You must not blame him if he be unfit by temperament. He had far better be a rising barrister than a half-hearted priest."

"I would sooner see him anything than that—a navvy rather."

"That is what I say," continued Miss Trelawny, triumphant; "and yet when I hinted as much he threw up his head with quite a Cœur-de-Lion look, and said, 'Yes, I know, but you must not tempt me to break through my father's wishes. If it can be done without sacrilege——' And then he stopped, and asked if it were only the Westmorland old women were so trying. I do call it very wrong, Mildred, that any bias should have been put on his wishes in this respect, especially as in two more years Richard knows he will be independent of his father." And as Mildred looked astonished at this piece of information, Ethel modestly returned that she had been intimate so many years at the vicarage—at least with the vicar and his wife and Richard—that many things came to her knowledge. Both she and her father knew that part of the mother's money had, with the vicar's consent, been settled on her boy, and

Mildred, who knew that a considerable sum had a few years before been left to Betha by an eccentric uncle whom Mr. Lambert had inadvertently offended, and that he had willed it exclusively for the use of his niece and her children, was nevertheless surprised to hear that while a moderate portion had been reserved to her girls, Roy's share was only small, while Richard at one-and-twenty would be put in possession of more than three hundred a year.

“ Between three and four, I believe Mr. Lambert told my father. Roy is to have a hundred a year, and the girls about two thousand apiece. Richard will have the lion's share. I believe this same uncle took a fancy to Roy's saucy face, and left a sum of money to be appropriated to his education. Richard says there will be plenty for a thorough art education and a year at Rome ; he hinted too that if Roy failed of achieving even moderate success in his profession, there was sufficient for both. Anything rather than Roy should be crossed in his ambition ! I call that generous, Mildred.”

“ And I ; but I am a little surprised at my brother making such a point of Richard being a clergyman ; he is very reticent at times. Come, Ethel, you look mysterious. I suppose you can explain even this ?”

"I can ; but at least you are hardly such a stranger to your own nephews and nieces as not to be aware of the worldly consideration there is involved."

" You forget," returned Mildred, sadly, " what a bad correspondent my brother is ; Betha was better, but it was not often the busy house-mother could find leisure for long chatty letters. You are surely not speaking of what happened when Richard was fourteen ? "

Ethel nodded and continued :

" That accounts of course for his being in such favour at the Palace. They say the Bishop and Mrs. Douglas would do anything for him—that they treat him as though he were their own son ; Rolf and he are to go to the same college, Magdalen, too, though Mr. Lambert wanted him to go to Queen's ; they say, if anything happened to Mr. Lambert, that Richard would be sure of the living ; in a worldly point of view it certainly sounds better than a briefless barrister."

" Ethel, you must not say such things. I cannot allow that my brother would be influenced by such worldly considerations, tempting as they are," replied Mildred, indignantly.

But Ethel laid her hand softly on her arm.

" Dear Mildred, this is only one side of the ques-

tion ; that something far deeper is involved I know from Richard himself ; I heard it years ago, when Cardie was younger, and had not learned to be proud and cold with his old playmate," and Ethel's tone was a little sad.

" May I know ? " asked Mildred, pleadingly ; " there is no fear of Richard ever telling me himself."

Ethel hesitated slightly.

" He might not like it ; but no, there can be no harm, you ought to know it, Mildred ; until now it seemed so beautiful, Richard thought so himself."

" You mean that Betha wished it as well as Arnold ? "

" Ah ! you have guessed it. What if the parents, in the fulness of their fresh young happiness, desired to dedicate their firstborn to the priesthood, would not this better fit your conception of your brother's character, always so simple and unconventional ? "

A gleam of pleasure passed over Mildred's face, but it was mixed with pain. A fresh light seemed thrown on Richard's difficulty ; she could understand the complication now. With Richard's deep love for his mother, would he not be tempted to

regard her wishes as binding, all the more that it involved sacrifice on his part ?

“ It might be so, but Richard should not feel it obligatory to carry out his parents’ wish if there be any moral hindrance,” she continued thoughtfully.

“ That is what I tell him. I have reason to know that it was a favourite topic of conversation between the mother and son, and Mrs. Lambert often assured me, with tears in her eyes, that Richard was ardent to follow his father’s profession. I remember on the eve of his confirmation that he told me himself that he felt he was training for the noblest vocation that could fall to the lot of man. Until two years ago there was no hint of repugnance, not a whisper of dissent ; no wonder all this is a blow to his father ! ”

“ No, indeed ! ” assented Mildred.

“ Can you guess what has altered him so ? ” continued Ethel, with a scrutinising glance. “ I have noticed a gradual change in him the last two or three years ; he is more reserved, less candid in every way. I confess I have hardly understood him of late.”

“ He has not recovered his mother’s death,” returned Mildred, evasively ; it was a relief to her that Ethel was in ignorance of the real cause of the

change in Richard. She herself was the only person who held the full clue to the difficulty; Richard's reserve had baffled his father. Mr. Lambert had no conception of the generous scruples that had hindered his son's confidence, and prevented him from availing himself of his tempting offer; and as she thought of the Cœur-de-Lion look with which he had repelled Ethel's glowing description, a passionate pity woke in her heart, and for the moment she forgave the chafed bitter temper, in honest consideration for the noble struggle that preceded it.

“What were you telling me about Richard and young Douglas?” she asked, after a minute’s pause, during which Ethel, disappointed by her unexpected reserve, had relapsed into silence. “Betha was ill at the time, or I should have had a more glowing description than Arnold’s brief paragraph afforded me. I know Richard jumped into the mill-stream and pulled one of the young Douglases out; but I never heard the particulars.”

“You astonish me by your cool manner of talking about it. It was an act of pure heroism not to be expected in a boy of fourteen; all the county rang with it for weeks afterwards. He and Rolf were playing down by the mill, at Dalston,

a few miles from the Palace, and somehow Rolf slipped over the low parapet : you know the mill-stream : it has a dangerous eddy, and there is a dark deep pool that makes you shudder to look at : the miller's man heard Richard's shout of distress, but he was at the topmost story, and long before he could have got to the place the lad must have been swept under the wheel. Richard knew this, and the gallant little fellow threw off his jacket and jumped in. Rolf could not swim, but Richard struck out with all his might and caught him by his sleeve just as the eddy was sucking him in. Richard was strong even then, and he would have managed to tow him into shallow water but for Rolf's agonised struggles ; as it was, he only just managed to keep his head above water, and prevent them both from sinking until help came. Braithwaite had not thrown the rope a moment too soon, for, as he told the Bishop afterwards, both the boys were drifting helplessly towards the eddy. Richard's strength was exhausted by Rolf's despairing clutches, but he had drawn Rolf's head on his breast and was still holding him up ; he fainted as they were hauled up the bank, and as it was, his heroism cost him a long illness. I have called him Cœur-de-Lion ever since."

"Noble boy!" returned Mildred, with sparkling eyes; but they were dim too.

"There, I hear the horses! how quickly time always passes in your company, Mildred. Good-bye; I must not give papa time to get one foot out of the stirrup, or he will tell me I have kept him waiting," and leaving Mildred to follow her more leisurely, Ethel gathered up her long habit and quickly disappeared.

Later that evening as Dr. Heriot passed through the dusky courtyard, he found Mildred waiting in the porch.

"How late you are; I almost feared you were not coming to-night," she said anxiously, in answer to his cheery "good evening."

"Am I to flatter myself that you were watching for me then?" he returned, veiling a little surprise under his usual light manner. "How are all the tempers, Miss Lambert? I hope I am not required to call spirits blue and grey from the vasty deep, as I am not sure that I feel particularly sportive to-night."

"I wanted to speak to you about Olive," returned Mildred, quietly ignoring the banter. "She does not seem well. The headache was fully accounted for yesterday, but I do not like the

look of her to-night. I felt her pulse just now, and it was quick, weak, and irregular, and she was complaining of giddiness and a ringing in her ears."

"I have noticed she has not looked right for some days, especially on St. Peter's day. Do you wish me to see her?" he continued, with a touch of professional gravity.

"I should be much obliged if you would," she returned, gratefully; "she is in my room at present, as Chriss's noise disturbs her. Your visit will put her out a little, as any questioning about her health seems to make her irritable."

"She will not object to an old friend; anyhow, we must brave her displeasure. Will you lead the way, Miss Lambert?"

They found Olive sitting huddled up in her old position, and looking wan and feverish. She shaded her eyes a little fretfully from the candle Mildred carried, and looked at Dr. Heriot rather strangely and with some displeasure.

"How do you feel to-night, Olive?" he asked kindly, possessing himself with some difficulty of the dry languid hand, and scrutinising with anxiety the sunken countenance before him. Two days of agitation and suppressed illness had quite altered the girl's appearance.

"I am well—~~at least, only~~ tired—there is nothing the matter with me. Aunt Milly ought not to have troubled you," still irritably.

"Aunt Milly knows trouble is sometimes a pleasure. You are not well, Olive, or you would not be so cross with your old friend."

She hesitated, put up her hand to her head, and looked ready to burst into tears.

"Come," he continued, sitting down beside her, and speaking gently as though to a child, "you are ill or unhappy—or both, and talking makes your head ache."

"Yes," she returned, mechanically, "it is always aching now, but it is nothing."

"Most people are not so stoical. You must not keep things so much to yourself, Olive. If you would own the truth I dare say you have felt languid and disinclined to move for several days?"

"I dare say. I cannot remember," she faltered but his keen, steady glance was compelling her to rouse herself.

"And you have not slept well, and your limbs ache as though you were tired and bruised, and your thoughts get a little confused and troublesome towards evening."

"They are always that," she returned, heavily

but she did not refuse to answer the few professional questions that Dr. Heriot put. His grave manner, and the thoughtful way in which he watched Olive, caused Mildred some secret uneasiness ; it struck her that the girl was a little incoherent in her talk.

“ Well—well,” he said, cheerfully, laying down the hand, “ you must give up the fruitless struggle and submit to be nursed well again. Get her to bed, Miss Lambert, and keep her and the room as cool as possible. She will remain here, I suppose,” he continued abruptly, and as Mildred assented, he seemed relieved. “ I will send her some medicine at once. I shall see you downstairs presently,” he finished pointedly ; and Mildred, who understood him, returned in the affirmative. She was longing to have Dr. Heriot’s opinion ; but she was too good a nurse not to make the patient her first consideration. Supper was over by the time the draught was administered, and Olive left fairly comfortable with Nan within earshot. The girls had already retired to their rooms, and Dr. Heriot was evidently waiting for Mildred, for he seemed absent and slightly inattentive to the vicar’s discourse. Richard, who was at work over some of his father’s papers, made no attempt to join in the conversation.

Mr. Lambert interrupted himself on Mildred's entrance.

"By the bye, Milly, have you spoken to Heriot about Olive?"

"Yes, I have seen her, Mr. Lambert; her aunt was right; the girl is very far from well."

"Nothing serious, I hope," ejaculated the vicar, while Richard looked up quickly from his writing. Dr. Heriot looked a little embarrassed.

"I shall judge better to-morrow; the symptoms will be more decided; but I am afraid, that is, I am nearly certain, that it is a touch of typhoid fever."

The stifled exclamation came not from the vicar, but from the farthest corner of the room. Mr. Lambert merely turned a little paler, and clasped his hands.

"God forbid, Heriot! That poor child!"

"We shall know in a few hours for certain—she is ill, very ill I should say."

"But she was with us, she dined with us to-day," gasped Richard, unable to comprehend what was the true state of the case.

"It is not uncommon for people, who are really ill of fever, to go about for some days until they can struggle with the feelings of illness no longer—"

To-night there is slight confusion, and incoherence, and the ringing in the ears that is frequently the forerunner of delirium ; she will be a little wandering to-night," he continued, turning to Mildred.

" You must give me your instructions," she returned, with the calmness of one to whom illness was no novelty ; but Mr. Lambert interrupted her.

" Typhoid fever ; the very thing that caused such mortality in the Farrer and Bales' cottages last year."

" I should not be surprised if we find Olive has been visiting there of late, and inhaling some of the poisonous gases. I have always said this place is enough to breed a fever ; the water is unwholesome, too, and she is so careless that she may have forgotten how strongly I condemned it. The want of waterworks, and the absence of the commonest precautions, are the crying evils of a place like this." And Dr. Heriot threw up his head and began to pace the room, as was his fashion when roused or excited, while he launched into bitter invectives against the suicidal ignorance that set health at defiance by permitting abuses that were enough to breed a pestilence.

The full amount of the evil was as yet unknown to Mildred ; but sufficient detail was poured into

her shrinking ear to justify Dr. Heriot's indignation, and she was not a little shocked to find the happy valley was not exempt from the taint of fatal ignorance and prejudice.

"Your old hobby, Heriot," said Mr. Lambert, with a faint smile; "but at least the Board of Guardians are taking up the question seriously now."

"How could they fail to do so after the last report of the medical officer of health? We shall get our waterworks now, I suppose, through stress of hard fighting; but——"

"But my poor child——" interrupted Mr. Lambert, anxiously.

Dr. Heriot paused in his restless walk.

"Will do well, I trust, with her youth, sound constitution, and your sister's good nursing. I was going to say," he continued, turning to Mr. Lambert, "that with your old horror of fevers, you would be glad if the others were to be removed from any possible contagion that might arise; though, as I have already told you, that I cannot pronounce decidedly whether it be the *typhus mitior* or the other; in a few hours the symptoms will be decided. But anyhow it is as well to be on the safe side, and Polly and Chriss can come to me;

we can find plenty of room for Richard and Royal as well."

" You need not arrange for me, I shall stay with my father and Aunt Milly," returned Richard abruptly, tossing back the wave of dark hair that lay on his forehead, and pushing away his chair.

" Nay, Cardie, I shall not need you ; and your aunt will find more leisure for her nursing if you are all off her hands. I shall be easier too. Heriot knows my old nervousness in this respect."

" I shall not leave you, father," was Richard's sole rejoinder ; but his father's affectionate and anxious glance was unperceived as he quickly gathered up the papers and left the room.

" I think Dick is right," returned Dr. Heriot, cheerfully. " The vicarage need not be cleared as though it were the pestilence. Now, Miss Lambert, I will give you a few directions, and then I must say good-night."

When Mildred returned to her charge, she found Richard standing by the bedside, contemplating his sister with a grave, impassive face. Olive did not seem to notice him ; she was moving restlessly on her pillow, her dark hair unbound and falling on her flushed face. Richard gathered it up gently and looked at his aunt.

"We may have to get rid of some of it to-morrow," she whispered; "what a pity, it is so long and beautiful; but it will prevent her losing all. You must not stay now, Richard, I fancy it disturbs her," as Olive muttered something drowsily, and flung her arms about a little wildly; "leave her to me to-night, dear; I will come to you first thing to-morrow morning, and tell you how she is."

"Thank you," he replied, gratefully.

Mildred was not wrong in her surmises that something like remorse for his unkindness made him stoop over the bed with the softly-uttered "Good-night, Livy."

"Good-night," she returned, drowsily. "Don't trouble about me, Cardie;" and with that he was fain to retire.

Things continued in much the same state for days. Dr. Heriot's opinion of the nature of the disease was fully confirmed. There was no abatement of fever, but an increase of debility. Olive's delirium was never violent, it was rather a restlessness and confusion of thought; she lay for hours in a semi-somnolent state, half-muttering to herself, yet without distinct articulation. Now and then a question would rouse her, and she would give a

rational answer ; but she soon fell back into the old drowsy state again.

Her nights were especially troubled in this respect. In the day she was comparatively quiet ; but for many successive nights all natural sleep departed from her, and her confused and incoherent talk was very painful to hear.

Mildred fancied that Richard's presence made her more restless than at other times ; but when she hinted this, he looked so pained that she could not find it in her heart to banish him, especially as his ready strength and assistance were a great comfort to her. Mildred had refused all exterior help. Nan's watchful care was always available during her hours of necessary repose, and Mildred had been so well trained in the school of nursing, that a few hours' sound sleep would send her back to her post rested and refreshed. Dr. Heriot's admiration of his model nurse, as he called her, was genuine and loudly expressed ; and he often assured Mr. Lambert, when unfavourable symptoms set in, that if Olive recovered it would be mainly owing to her aunt's unwearied nursing.

Mildred often wondered what she would have done without Richard as Olive grew weaker, and the slightest exertion brought on fainting, or

covered her with a cold, clammy sweat. Richard's strong arms were of use now to lift her into easier positions. Mildred never suffered him to share in the night watches, for which she and Nan were all-sufficient; but the last thing at night, and often before the early dawn, his pale anxious face would be seen outside the door; and all through the day he was ever at hand to render valuable assistance. Once Mildred was surprised to hear her name softly called from the far end of the lobby, and on going out she found herself face to face with Ethel Trelawny.

"Oh, Ethel! this is very wrong. Your father—"

"I told her so," returned Richard, who looked half grateful and half uneasy; "but she would come, she said she must see you. Aunt Milly looks pale," he continued, turning to Ethel; "but we cannot be surprised at that, she gets so little sleep."

"You will be worn out, Mildred. Papa will be angry, I know; but I cannot help it. I mean to stay and nurse Olive."

"My dear Ethel!" Richard uttered an incredulous exclamation; but Miss Trelawny was evidently in earnest; her fine countenance looked pale and saddened.

“ I can and must ; do let me, Mildred. I have often stayed up all night for my own pleasure.”

“ But you are so unused to illness, it cannot be thought of for a moment,” ejaculated Richard in alarm.

“ Women ’nurse by instinct. I should look at Mildred, she would soon teach me. Why do you all persist in treating me as though I were quite helpless ? Papa is wrong ; typhoid fever is not infectious, and if it were, what use am I to any one ? My life is not of as much consequence as Mildred’s.”

“ There is always the risk of contagion, and—and—why will you always speak of yourself so recklessly, Miss Trelawny ?” interposed Richard in a pained voice, “ when you know how precious your life is to us all ; ” but Ethel turned from him impatiently.

“ Mildred, you will let me come ? ”

“ No, Ethel, indeed I cannot, though I am very grateful to you for wishing it. Your father is your first consideration, and his wishes should be your law.”

“ Papa is afraid of everything,” she pleaded ; “ he will not let me go into the cottages where there is illness, and——”

"He is right to take care of his only child,"
replied Mildred, calmly.

Richard seemed relieved.

"I knew you would say so, Aunt Milly; we are
grateful, more grateful than I can say, dear Miss
Trelawny; but I knew it ought not to be."

"And you must not come here again without
your father's permission," continued Mildred, gently,
and taking her hands; "we have to remember
sometimes that to obey is better than sacrifice, dear
Ethel. I am grieved to disappoint your generous
impulse," as the girl turned silently away with the
tears in her eyes.

"Dr. Heriot said I should have no chance, and
Richard was as bad. Well, good-bye," trying to
rally her spirits as she saw Mildred looked really
pained. "I envy you your labour of love, Mildred,
it is sweet, it must be sweet to be really useful to
some one;" and the sigh that accompanied her
words evidently came from a deep place in Ethel
Trelawny's heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE GATE AJAR.

“ Oh, live !
So endeth faint the low pathetic cry
Of love, whom death hath taught, love cannot die.”
Poems by the Author of ‘John Halifax.’

“ His dews drop mutely on the hill,
His cloud above it saileth still,
Though on its slope men sow and reap :
More softly than the dew is shed,
Or cloud is floated overhead,
He giveth His beloved sleep.”

E. B. Browning.

The fever had run its course,—never virulent or
cessive, there had still been no abatement in the
favourable symptoms, and, as the critical days
proached, Mildred’s watchfulness detected an
increased gravity in Dr. Heriot’s manner. Always
indious in his attentions, they now became almost
remitting ; his morning and evening visits were
supplemented by a noonday one ; by and by every
moment he could snatch from his other patients
was spent by Olive’s bedside.

A silent oppression hung over the vicarage ;

anxious footsteps crept stealthily up to the front door at all hours, with low-whispered inquiries. Every morning and evening Mildred telegraphed signals to Roy and Polly as they stood on the other side of the beck in Hillsbottom, watching patiently for the white fluttering pendant that was to send them away in comparative tranquillity. Sometimes Roy would climb the low hill in Hillsbottom, and lie for hours, with his eyes fixed on the broad projecting window, on the chance of seeing Mildred steal there for a moment's fresh air. Roy, contrary to his usual light-heartedness, had taken Olive's illness greatly to heart; the remembrance of his hard words oppressed and tormented him. Chriss often kept him company—Chriss, who grew crosser day by day with suppressed unhappiness, and who vented her uncomfortable feelings in contradicting everything and everybody from morning to night.

One warm sunshiny afternoon, Mildred, who was sensible of unusual languor and oppression, had just stolen to the window to refresh her eyes with the soft green of the fellsides, when Dr. Heriot, who had been standing thoughtfully by the bedside, suddenly roused himself and followed her.

“Miss Lambert, do you know I am going to assert my authority?”

Mildred looked up inquiringly, but there was no answering smile on her pale face.

"I am going to forbid you this room for the next two hours. Indeed," as Mildred shook her head incredulously, "I am serious in what I say; you have just reached the limit of endurance, and an attack of faintness may possibly be the result, if you do not follow my advice. An hour's fresh air will send you back fit for your work."

"But Olive! indeed I cannot leave Olive, Dr. Heriot."

"Not in my care?" very quietly. "Of course I shall remain here until you return."

"You are very kind; but indeed—no—I cannot go; please do not ask me, Dr. Heriot;" and Mildred turned very pale.

"I do not ask, I insist on it," in a voice Mildred never heard before from Dr. Heriot. "Can you not trust me?" he continued, relapsing into his ordinary gentle tone. "Believe me, I would not banish you but for your own good. You know"—he hesitated; but the calm, quiet face seemed to reassure him—"things can only go on like this for a few hours, and we may have a very trying night before us. You will want all your strength for the next day or two."

" You apprehend a change for the worse ? asked Mildred, drawing her breath more quickly but speaking in a tone as low as his, for Richard was watching them anxiously from the other end of the room.

" I do not deny we have reason to fear it," I returned, evasively ; " but there will be no change of any kind for some hours."

" I will go, then, if Richard will take me," she replied, quietly ; and Richard rose reluctantly.

" You must not bring her back for two hours" was Dr. Heriot's parting injunction, as Mildred paused by Olive's bedside for a last lingering look. Olive still lay in the same heavy stupor, only broke from time to time by the imperfect muttering. The long hair had all been cut off, and only a dark lock or two escaped from under the wet cloths. The large hollow eyes looked fixed and brilliant while the parched and blackened lips spoke of low consuming fever. As Mildred turned away, she was startled by the look of anguish that crossed Richard's face ; but he followed her without a word.

It was a lovely afternoon in July, the air was full of the warm fragrance of new-mown hay, the distant fells lay in purple shadow. As they walked through Hillsbottom, Mildred's eyes were almos-

dazzled by the soft waves of green upland shining in **the** sunshine. Clusters of pink briar roses hung on **every** hedge ; down by the weir some children were wading among the shallow pools ; further on the beck widened, and flowed smoothly between its wooded banks. By and by they came to a rough foot-bridge, leading to a little lane, its hedgerows bordered with ferns, and gay with rose-campion and soft blue hare-bells, while trails of meadow-sweet scented the air ; beyond, lay a beautiful meadow, **belting** Podgill, its green surface gemmed with the **white** starry eyebright, and golden in parts with **yellow** trefoil and ragwort.

Mildred stooped to gather, half mechanically, **the** blue-eyed gentian that Richard was crushing under his foot ; and then a specimen of the soft-tinted campanella attracted her, its cluster of bell-shaped blossoms towering over the other wild-flowers.

" Shall we go down into Podgill, Aunt Milly, it is shadier than this lane ? " and Mildred, who was revolving painful thoughts in her mind, followed him, still silent, through the low-hanging woods, with its winding beck and rough stepping-stones, until they came to a green slope, spanned by the viaduct.

"Let us sit down here, Richard ; how quiet and cool it is !" and Mildred seated herself on the grass, while Richard threw himself down beside her.

"How silent we have been, Richard. I don't think either of us cared to talk ; but Dr. Heriot was right, I feel refreshed already."

"I am glad we came then, Aunt Milly."

"I never knew any one so thoughtful. Richard I want to speak to you ; did you ever find out that Olive wrote poetry ?"

Richard raised himself in surprise.

"No, Aunt Milly."

"I want to show you this ; it was written on a stray leaf, and I ventured to capture it ; it may help you to understand that in her own way Olive has suffered."

Richard took the paper from her without a word ; but Mildred noticed his hand shook. Was it cruel thus to call his hardness to remembrance ? For a moment Mildred's soft heart wavered over the task she had set for herself.

It was scrawled in Olive's school-girl hand, and in some parts was hard to decipher, especially as now and then a blot of tear-drops had rendered it

illegible ; but nevertheless Richard succeeded in reading it.

“ How speed our lost in the Unknown Land,
Our dear ones gone to that distant strand ?

Do they know that our hearts are sore
With longing for faces that never come,
With longing to hear in our silent home
The voices that sound no more ?
There’s a desolate look by the old hearth-stone,
That tells of some light of the household gone
To dwell with the ransomed band ;
But none may follow their upward track,
And never, ah ! never, a word comes back
To tell of the Unknown Land !

We know by a gleam on the brow so pale,
When the soul bursts forth from its mortal veil,
And the gentle and good departs,
That the dying ears caught the first faint ring
Of the songs of praise that the angels sing ;
But back to our yearning hearts
Comes never, ah ! never, a word to tell
That the purified spirit we love so well
Is safe on the heavenly strand ;
That the Angel of Death has another gem
To set in the star-decked diadem
Of the King of the Unknown Land !

How speeed our lost in the realms of air
We would ask—we would ask, Do they love us there ?
Do they know that our hearts are sore,
That the cup of sorrow oft overflows,
And our eyes grow dim with weeping for those—
For those who shall ‘ weep no more ’ ?

And when the Angel of Death shall call,
 And earthly chains from about us fall,
 Will they meet us with clasping hand ?
 But never, ah ! never a voice replies
 From the 'many mansions' above the skies
 To tell of the Unknown Land ! " *

" Aunt Milly, why did you show me this ?" and Richard's eyes, full of reproachful pain, fixed themselves somewhat sternly on her face.

" Because I want you to understand. Look, there is another on the next leaf ; see, she has called it 'A little while' and 'for ever.' My poor girl, every word is so true of her own earnest nature."

" 'For ever,' they are fading,
 Our beautiful, our bright ;
 They gladden us 'a little while,'
 Then pass away from sight ;
 'A little while' we're parted
 From those who love us best,
 Who gain the goal before us
 And enter into rest.

Our path grows very lonely,
 And still those words beguile,
 And cheer our footsteps onward ;
 'Tis but a little while.

'A little while' earth's sorrow,—
Its burdens and its care,
Its struggles 'neath the crosses,
Which we of earth must bear.

There's time to do and suffer—
To work our Master's will,
But not for vain regretting
For thoughts or deeds of ill.
Too short to spend in weeping
O'er broken hopes and flowers,
For wandering and wasting,
Is this strange life of ours.

Though, when our cares oppress us,
Earth's 'little while' seems long,
If we would win the battle
We must be brave and strong.
And so with humble spirit,
But highest hopes and aim,
The goal so often longed for
We may perhaps attain.

'For ever' and 'for ever'
To dwell among the blest,
Where sorrows never trouble
The deep eternal rest;
When one by one we gather
Beneath our Father's smile,
And Heaven's sweet 'for ever'
Drowns earth's sad 'little while.' "

" Well, Richard ? "

But there was no answer ; only the buzzing of
sects in giddy circles broke the silence, mingled

with the far-off twitter of birds. Only when Mildred again looked up, the paper had fluttered to their feet, and Richard had covered his face with his shaking hands.

"Dear Cardie, forgive me; I did not mean to pain you like this."

"Aunt Milly," in a voice so hoarse and changed that Mildred quite started, "if she die, if Olive die, I shall never know a moment's peace again;" and the groan that accompanied the words wrung Mildred's tender heart with compassion.

"God forbid we should lose her, Richard," she returned, gently.

"Do not try to deceive me," he returned, bitterly, in the same low, husky tones. "I heard what he said—what you both said—that it could not go on much longer; and I saw his face when he thought he was alone. There is no hope—none."

"Oh, Richard, hush," replied Mildred, in uncontrollable agitation; "while there is life, there is hope. Think of David, 'While the child was yet alive I fasted and wept,' he could not tell whether God meant to be gracious to him or not. We will pray, you and I, that our girl may be spared."

But Richard recoiled in positive horror.

"I pray, Aunt Milly? I, who have treated her so cruelly? I, who have flung hard words to her, who have refused to forgive her? I——" and he hid his pale, convulsed face in his hands again.

"But you have forgiven her now, you do her justice. You believe how truly she loved, she will ever love you."

"Too late," he groaned. "Yes, I see it now, she was too good for us; we made her unhappy, and God is taking her home to her mother."

"Then you will let her go, dear Cardie. Hush, it would break her heart to see you so unhappy;" and Mildred knelt down on the grass beside him, and stroked back the dark waves of hair tenderly. She knew the pent-up anguish of weeks must have its vent, now that his stoical manhood had broken down. Remorse, want of rest, deadly conflict and anxiety, had at last overcome the barrier of his reserve; and, as he flung himself down beside her, with his face hidden in the bracken, she knew the hot tears were welling through his fingers.

For a long time she sat beside him, till his agitation had subsided; and then, in her low, quiet voice, she began to talk to him. She spoke of Olive's purity and steadfastness of purpose, her self-devotedness and power of love; and Richard

raised his head to listen. She told him of those Sunday afternoons spent by her mother's grave, that quiet hour of communion bracing her for the jars and discords of the week. And she hinted at those weary moods of perpetual self-torture and endless scruple, which hindered all vigorous effort and clouded her youth.

"A diseased sensibility and over-much imagination have resulted in the despondency that has so discouraged and annoyed you, Richard. She has dwelt so long among shadows of her own raising, that she has grown a weary companion to healthier minds ; her very love is so veiled by timidity that it has given you an impression of her coldness."

"Blind fool that I was," he ejaculated. "Oh, Aunt Milly, do you think she can ever forgive me?"

"There can be no question of forgiveness at all ; do not distress her by asking for it, Richard. Olive's heart is as simple as a little child's ; it is not capable of resentment. Tell her that you love her, and you will make her happy."

Richard did not answer for a minute, his thoughts had suddenly taken a new turn.

"I never could tell how it was she read me so correctly," he said at last ; "her telling my father, and not me, was so incomprehensible."

"She did not dare to speak to you, and she was so unhappy ; but, Richard, even Olive does not hold the clue to all this trouble."

He started nervously, changed colour, and plucked the blades of grass restlessly. But in his present softened mood, Mildred knew he would not repulse her ; trouble might be near at hand, but at least he would not refuse her sympathy any longer.

"Dear Cardie, your difficulty is a very real one, and only time and prayerful consideration can solve it ; but beware how you let the wishes of your dead mother, dear and binding as they may be to you, prove a snare to your conscience. Richard, I knew her well enough to be sure that was the last thing she would desire."

The blood rushed to Richard's face, eager words rose to his lips, but he restrained them ; but the grateful gleam in his eyes spoke volumes.

"That is your real opinion, Aunt Milly."

"Indeed it is. Unready hands, an unprepared heart, are not fit for the sanctuary. I may wish with you that difficulties had not arisen, that you could carry out your parents' dedication and wish ; but vocation cannot be forced, neither must you fall into Olive's mistake of supposing self-sacrifice is



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the one thing needful. After all, our first duty is ~~s~~ to be true to ourselves."

"Aunt Milly, how wise you are!" he exclaimed ~~H~~ in involuntary admiration. "No one, not even my father, put it so clearly. You are right, I do not mean to sacrifice myself unless I can feel it my duty to do so. But it is a question I must settle with myself."

"True, dear, only remember the brave old verse—

'Stumbleth he who runneth fast?
Dieth he who standeth still?
Not by haste or rest can ever
Man his destiny fulfil.'

'Never hasting, never resting,' a fine life-motto, Cardie; but our time is nearly at an end, we must be going now."

As they walked along, Richard returned of his own accord to the subject they had been discussing, and owned his indecision was a matter of great grief to him.

"Conscientious doubts will find their answer some day," replied Mildred; "but I wish you had not refused to confide them to your father."

Richard bit his lip.

"It was wrong of me; I know it, Aunt Milly;

but it would have been so painful to him, and so humiliating to myself."

"Hardly so painful as to be treated like a stranger by his own son. You have no idea how sorely your reserve has fretted him."

"It was cowardly of me ; but indeed, Aunt Milly, the whole question was involved in difficulty. My father is sometimes a little vague in his manner of treating things ; he is more scholarly than practical, and I own I dreaded complication and disappointment."

Mildred sighed. Perhaps after all he was right. Her brother was certainly a little dreamy and wanting in concentration and energy just now ; but little did Richard know the depth of his father's affection. Just as the old war-horse will neigh at the sound of the battle, and be ready to rush into the midst of the glittering phalanx, so would Arnold Lambert have warred with the grisly phantoms of doubt and misbelief that were leagued against Richard's boyish faith, ready to lay down his life if need be for his boy ; but as he sat hour after hour in his lonely study, the sadness closed more heavily round him — sadness for his lost love in heaven, his lost confidence on earth.

Dr. Heriot gave Mildred and Richard a searching

glance as they re-entered the room. Both look~~e~~ worn and pale, but a softened and subdued expression was on Richard's face as he stood by the bed side, looking down on his sister.

"No change," whispered Mildred.

"None at present; but there may be a partially. Where is Mr. Lambert, I want to speak to him;" and, as though to check further questioning, Dr. Heriot reiterated a few instructions, and left the room.

The hours passed on. Richard, in spite of his aunt's whispered remonstrances, still kept watch beside her; and Mr. Lambert, who as usual had been praying by the side of his sick child, and had breathed over her unconsciousness his solemn benediction, had just left the room, when Mildred, who was giving her nourishment, noticed a slight change in Olive, a sudden gleam of consciousness in her eyes, perhaps called forth by her father's prayer, and she signed to Richard to bring him back.

Was this the rally of which Dr. Heriot spoke? the brief flicker of the expiring torch flaming up before it is extinguished? Olive seemed trying to concentrate her drowsy faculties, the indistinct muttering became painfully earnest, but the un-

happy father, though he placed his ear to the lips of the sinking girl, could connect no meaning with the inarticulate sounds, until Mildred's greater calmness came to his help.

"Home. I think she said home, Arnold;" and then with a quick intuitive light that surprised herself, "I think she wishes to know if God means to take her home."

Olive's restlessness a little abated. This time the parched and blackened lips certainly articulated "home" and "mother." They could almost fancy she smiled.

"Oh, do not leave me, my child," ejaculated Mr. Lambert, stretching out his arms as though to keep her. "God is good and merciful; He will not take away another of my darlings; stay a little longer with your poor father;" and Olive understood him, for the bright gleam faded away.

"Oh, father, she will surely stay if we ask her," broke in Richard in an agitated voice, thrusting himself between them and speaking with a hoarse sob; "she is so good, and knows we all love her and want her. You will not break my heart, Livy, You will forgive me and stay with us a little?" and Richard flung himself on his knees and buried his head on the pillow.

Ah, the bright gleam had certainly faded now there was a wandering, almost a terrified expression in the hollow, brilliant eyes. Were those gates closing on her? would they not let her go?

"Cardie, dear Cardie, hush, you are agitating her; look how her eyelids are quivering and she has no power to speak. Arnold, ask him to be calm," and Mr. Lambert, still holding his seemingly dying child, laid his other hand on Richard's bent head.

"Hush, my son, we must not grieve a departing spirit. I was wrong. His will be done even in this. He has given, and He must take away; be silent while I bless my child again, my child whom I am giving back to Him and to her mother," but as he lifted up his hands the same feeble articulation smote on their ear.

"Cardie wants me—poor Cardie—poor papa—not my will."

Did Mildred really catch those words, struggling like broken breaths?—was it the cold sweat of the death-damp that gathered on the clammy brow?—were the fingers growing cold and nerveless on which Richard's hot lips were pressed?—were those dark eyes closing to earth for ever?

"Mildred—Richard—what is this?"

"‘Lord, if he sleep he shall do well,’ exclaimed the disciples.”

“Hush ; thank God, this is sleep, natural sleep,—the crisis is passed, we shall save her yet,” and Dr. Heriot, who had just entered, beckoned the father and brother gently from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

COMING BACK.

" If Thou shouldst bring me back to life,
 More humble I should be,
More wise, more strengthened for the strife,
 More apt to lean on Thee.
Should death be standing at the gate,
 Thus should I keep my vow,
But, Lord ! whatever be my fate,
 Oh, let me serve Thee now ! "—*Anne Brontë*.

" THIS sickness is not unto death."

The news that the crisis had passed, and that the disease that had so long baffled the physician's skill had taken a favourable turn, soon spread over the town like wildfire ; the shadow of death no longer lingered on the threshold of the vicarage ; there were trembling voices raised in the *Te Deum* the next morning ; the vicar's long pause in the Thanksgiving was echoed by many a throbbing heart ; Mildred's book was wet with her tears, and even Chrissy looked softened and subdued.

There were agitated greetings in the church porch afterwards. Olive's sick heart would have

been satisfied with the knowledge that she was beloved if she had seen Roy's glistening eyes and the silent pressure of congratulation that passed between her father and Richard.

"Heriot, we feel that under Providence we owe our girl's life to you."

"You are equally beholden to her aunt's nursing; but indeed, Mr. Lambert, I look upon your daughter's recovery as little less than a miracle. I certainly felt myself justified to prepare you for the worst last night; at one time she appeared to be sinking."

"She has been given back to us from the confines of the grave," was the solemn answer; and as he took his son's arm and they walked slowly down the churchyard he said, half to himself—"and a gift given back is doubly precious."

The same thought seemed in his mind when Richard entered the study late that night with the welcome tidings that Olive was again sleeping calmly.

"Oh, Cardie, last night we thought we should have lost our girl; after all, God has been good to me beyond my deserts."

"We may all say that, father."

"I have been thinking that we have none of us

appreciated Olive as we ought ; since she has been ill a hundred instances of her unselfishness have occurred to me ; in our trouble, Cardie, she thought for others, not for herself. I never remember seeing her cry except once, and yet the dear child loved her mother.”

Richard's face paled a little, but he made no answer ; he remembered but too well the time to which his father alluded, how, when in his jealous surveillance he had banished her from her father's room, he had found her haunting the passages with her pale face and black dress, or sitting on the stairs, a mute image of patience.

No, there had been no evidence of her grief ; others beside himself had marvelled at her changeless and monotonous calm ; she had harped on her mother's name with a persistency that had driven him frantic, and he had silenced the sacred syllables in a fit of nervous exasperation ; from the very first she had troubled and wearied him, she whom he was driven to confess was immeasurably his superior. Yes, the scales had fallen from his eyes, and as his father spoke a noble spirit pleaded in him, and the rankling confession at last found vent in the deep inward cry—

“ Father, I have sinned against heaven and before

Thee, in that I have offended one of Thy little ones," and the *Deo gratias* of an accepted repentance and possible atonement followed close upon the words.

"Father, I want to speak to you."

"Well, Cardie."

"I know how my silence has grieved you; Aunt Milly told me. I was wrong—I see it now."

Richard's face was crimsoning with the effort, but the look in his father's eyes as he laid his thin hand on his arm was sufficient reward.

"Thank God for this, my boy, that you have spoken to me at last of your own accord; it has lifted a heavy burthen from my heart."

"I ought not to have refused my confidence; you were too good to me. I did not deserve it."

"You thought you were strong enough to remove your own stumbling-blocks; it is the fault of the young generation, Cardie; it would fain walk by its own lights."

"I must allow my motives were mixed with folly, but the fear of troubling you was predominant."

"I know it, I know it well, my son, but all the same I have yearned to help you. I have myself to blame in this matter, but the thought that you would not allow me to share your trouble was a

greater punishment than even I could bear ; no, do not look so sorrowful, this moment has repaid me for all my pain."

But it was not in Richard's nature to do anything by halves, and in his generous compunction he refused to spare himself ; the barrier of his reserve once broken down, he made ample atonement for his past reticence, and Mr. Lambert more than once was forced to admit that he had misjudged his boy.

Late into the night they talked, and when they parted the basis of a perfect understanding was established between them ; if his son's tardy confidence had soothed and gratified Mr. Lambert, Richard on his side was equally grateful for the patience and loving forbearance with which his father strove to disentangle the webs that insidious argument had woven in his clear young brain ; there was much lurking mischief, much to clear away and remove, difficulties that only time and prayerful consideration could surmount ; but however saddened Mr. Lambert might feel in seeing the noxious weeds in that goodly vineyard, he was not without hope that in time Richard's tarnished faith might gleam out brightly again.

During the weeks that ensued there were many

opportunities for hours of quiet study and talk between the father and son ; in his new earnestness Mr. Lambert became less vague, this fresh obstacle roused all his energy ; there was something pathetic in the spectacle of the worn scholar and priest buckling on his ancient armour to do battle for his boy ; the old flash came to his eye, the ready vigour and eloquence to his speech, gleams of sapient wisdom startled Richard into new reverence, causing the young doubter to shrink and feel abashed.

“ If one could only know, if an angel from heaven might set the seal to our assurance,” he exclaimed once. “ Father, only to know, to be sure of these things.”

“ Oh, Cardie, what is that but following the example of the affectionate but melancholy Didymus ; — Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed ;’ the drowning mariner cannot see the wind that is lashing the waves that threaten to engulf his little bark, cannot ‘ tell whence it comes or whither it goes,’ yet faith settles the helm and holds the rudder, and bids him cling to the spar when all seems over.”

“ But he feels it beyond and around him ; he feels it as we feel the warmth of the latent sunshine

or the permeating influences of light ; we can see the light, father," he continued eagerly, " we can lift our eyes eagle-wise to the sun if we will ; why should our inner light be quenched and clouded ? "

" To test our faith, to make us hold on more securely ; after all, Cardie, the world beyond—truth revealed—religion—look to us often through life like light seen from the bottom of a well—below us darkness, then space, narrowed to our perception a glimmering of blue sky sown thick with stars, light, keen and arrowy, shining somewhere in the depths ; some of us rise to the light, drawn irresistibly to it, a few remain at the bottom of the well all their lives."

" And some are born blind."

" Let us leave them to the mercy of the Great Physician ; in our case scales may fall from our eyes, and still with imperfect vision we may look up and see men as trees walking, but we must grope on still. Ah, my boy, when in our religious hypochondria whole creeds desert us, and shreds and particles only remain of a fragmentary and doubtful faith, don't let us fight with shadows, which of their very nature elude and fade out of our grasp; let us fall on our knees rather, Cardie, and cry—' Lord, I believe—I will believe ; help Thou my unbelief.' "

Many and many such talks were held, the hours and days slipping away, Mildred meanwhile devoting herself to the precious work of nursing Olive back to convalescence.

It was a harder task than even Dr. Heriot expected ; slowly, painfully, almost unwillingly the girl tottered back to life ; now and then there were sensible relapses of weakness ; prostration, that was almost deathlike, then a faint flicker, followed by a conscious rally, times when they trembled and feared and then hoped again ; when the shadowy face and figure filled Mildred with vague alarm, and the blank despondency in the large dark eyes haunted her with a sense of pain.

In vain Mildred lavished on her the tenderest caresses ; for days there was no answering smile on the pallid face, and yet no invalid could be more submissive.

Unresistingly, uncomplainingly, Olive bore the weakness that was at times almost unendurable, obediently she took from their hands the nourishment they gave her, but there seemed no anxiety to shake off her illness ; it was as though she submitted to life rather than willed it, nay, as though she received it back with a regret and reluctance that caused even her unselfishness a struggle.

Was the cloud returning? Had they been wrong to pray so earnestly for her life? Would she come back to them a sadder and more weary Olive, to tax their forbearance afresh, instead of winning an added love; was she who had been as a little child set in their midst for an example of patient humility, to carry this burthen of despondent fear about with her from the dark valley itself?

Mildred was secretly trembling over these thoughts; they harassed and oppressed her; she feared lest Richard's new reverence and love for his sister should be impaired when he found the old infirmity still clinging to her; even now the sad look in her eyes somewhat oppressed him.

"Livy, you look sometimes as though you repented getting well," he said affectionately to her one day, when her languor and depression had been very great.

"Oh no, please don't say so, Cardie," she returned faintly, but the last trace of colour forsook her face at his words; "how can—how can you say that, when you know you wanted me?" and as the tears began to flow, Richard, alarmed and perplexed, soothed and comforted her.

Another day, when her father had been sitting by her, reading and talking to her, he noticed that

she looked at him with a sort of puzzled wonder in her eyes.

“ What is it, my child ? ” he asked, leaning over her and stroking her hair with caressing hand. “ Do you feel weary of the reading, Olive ? ”

“ No, oh no ; it was beautiful,” she returned, with a trembling lip ; “ I was only thinking—wondering why you loved me.”

“ Love you, my darling ! do not fathers love their children, especially when they have such good affectionate children ? ”

“ But I am not good,” she returned, with something of her old shrinking. “ Oh, papa, why did you and Cardie want me so, your poor useless Olive ; even Cardie loves me now, and I have done nothing but lie here and give trouble to you all ; but you are all so good—so good,” and Olive buried her pale face in her father’s shoulder.

The old self-depreciation waking up to life, the old enemy leaguing with languor and despondency to mar the sweet hopefulness of convalescence. Mildred in desperation determined to put her fears to the proof when Olive grew strong enough to bear any conversation.

The opportunity came sooner than she hoped.

One day the cloud lifted a little. Roy had been

admitted to his sister's room, and his agitation and sorrow at her changed appearance and his evident joy at seeing her again had roused Olive from her wonted lethargy. Mildred found her afterwards lying exhausted but with a smile on her face.

"Dear Roy," she murmured, "how good he was to me. Oh, Aunt Milly," clasping Mildred's hands between her wasted fingers, "I don't deserve for them to be so dear and good to me, it makes me feel as though I were wicked and ungrateful not to want to get well."

"I dreaded to hear you say this, Olive," returned Mildred. As she sat down beside her, her grieved look seemed a reproach to Olive.

"It was not that I wanted to leave you all," she said, laying her cheek against the hand she held, "but I have been such a trouble to every one ~~as~~ well as to myself; it seemed so nice to have done with it all—all the weariness and disappointment ~~I~~ mean."

"You were selfish for once in your life then—Olive," returned Mildred, trying to smile, but with a heavy heart.

"I tried not to be," she whispered. "I did not want you to be sorry, Aunt Milly; but I knew if I lived it would all come over again. It is the old—

troublesome Olive you are nursing," she continued softly, " who will try and disappoint you as she has always done. I can't get rid of my old self, and that is why I am sorry."

" Sorry because we are glad ; it is Olive and no other that we want."

" Oh, if I could believe that," returned the girl, her eyes filling with tears, " but it sounds too beautiful to be true, and yet I know it was only Cardie's voice that brought me back, he wanted me so badly, and he asked me to stay. I heard him —I heard him sob, Aunt Milly," clutching her aunt with weak, nerveless fingers.

" Are you sure, Olive ? You were fainting, you know."

" Yes, I was falling—falling into dark, starry depths, full of living creatures, wheels of light and flame seemed everywhere, and then darkness. I thought mamma had got me in her arms, she seemed by me through it all, and then I heard Cardie say I should break his heart, and then he sobbed, and papa blessed me. I heard some gate close after that and mamma's arms seemed to loosen from me, and I knew then I was not dying."

" But you were sorry, Olive."

" I tried not to be ; but it was hard, oh, so hard, Aunt Milly. Think what it was to have that door shut just as one's foot was on the threshold, and when I thought it was all over and I had got mamma back again ; but it was wrong to grieve. I have not earned my rest."

" Hush, my child, you must not take up a new lease of life so sadly ; this is a gift, Olive, a talent straight from the Master's hands, to be received with gratitude, to be used joyfully ; by and by, when you are stronger, you will find more beautiful work your death would have left unfinished."

A weary look crossed Olive's face.

" Shall I ever be strong enough to work again ? "

" You are working now ; nay, my child," as Olive looked up with languid surprise, " few of us are called upon to do a more difficult task than yours ; to take up life when we would choose death, to bear patiently the discipline of suffering and inaction, to wait till He says ' work.' "

" Dear Aunt Milly, you always say such comforting things. I thought I was only doing nothing but give you trouble."

" There you were wrong, Olive ; every time you suppress an impatient sigh, every time you call up a smile to cheer us, you are advancing a step —

gaining a momentary advantage over your old enemy ; you know my favourite verses—

‘ Broadest streams from narrowest sources,
Noblest trees from meanest seeds,
Mighty ends from small beginnings,
From lowly promise lofty deeds.

Acorns which the winds have scattered,
Future navies may provide ;
Thoughts at midnight, whispered lowly,
Prove a people’s future guide.’

I am a firm believer in little efforts, Olive.”

Olive was silent for a few minutes, but she appeared thinking deeply ; but when she spoke next it was in a calmer tone.

“ After all, Aunt Milly, want of courage is my greatest fault.”

“ I cannot deny it, dear.”

“ I am so afraid of responsibility that it seemed easier to die than to face it. You were right ; I was selfish to want to leave you all.”

“ You must try to rejoice with us that you are spared.”

“ Yes, I will try,” with a sigh ; but as she began to look white and exhausted, Mildred thought it wiser to drop the conversation.

The family circle was again complete in the
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vicarage, and in the evenings a part of the ~~fan~~ always gathered in the sick - room. This was hailed as a great privilege by the younger members — Roy, Polly, and Chriss eagerly disputing it. It was an understood thing that Richard should be always there ; Olive seemed restless without him. Roy was her next favourite ; his gentleness and affection seemed to soothe her ; but Mildred noticed that Polly's bright flow of spirits somewhat oppressed her, and it was not easy to check Chriss's voluble tongue.

One evening Ethel was admitted. She had pleaded so hard, that Richard had at last overcome Olive's shrinking reluctance to face any one outside the family circle ; but even Olive's timidity was not proof against Ethel's endearing ways ; and as Miss Trelawny, shocked and distressed at her changed appearance, folded the girl silently in her arms, the tears gathered to her eyes, and for a moment she seemed unable to speak.

" You must not be so sorry," whispered Olive gratefully ; " Aunt Milly will soon nurse me quite well."

" But I was not prepared for such a change," stammered Ethel. " Dear Olive, to think how you must have suffered ! I should hardly have known

you; and yet," she continued, impulsively, "I never liked the look of you so well."

"We tell her she has grown," observed Richard, cheerfully; "she has only to get fat to make a fine woman. Aunt Milly has contrived such a bewitching head-dress, that we do not regret the loss of all that beautiful hair."

"Oh, Cardie, as though that mattered;" but Olive blushed under her brother's affectionate scrutiny. Ethel Trelawny was right when she owned Olive's appearance had never pleased her more, emaciated and changed as she was. The sad gentleness of the dark, unsmiling eyes was infinitely attractive. The heavy sallowness was gone; the thin white face looked fair and transparent; little rings of dark hair peeped under the lace cap; but what struck Ethel most was the rapt and elevated expression of the girl's face—a little dreamy, perhaps, but suggestive of another and nobler Olive.

"Oh, Olive, how strange it seems, to think you have come back to us again, when Mildred thought you had gone!" ejaculated Ethel, in a tone almost of awe.

"Yes," returned Olive, simply; "I know what

death means now. When I come to die, I shall feel I know it all before."

"But you did not die, dear Olive," exclaimed Ethel, in a startled voice. "No one can know but Lazarus and the widow's son; and they have told us nothing."

"Aunt Milly says they were not allowed to tell; she thinks there is something awful in their silence; but all the same I shall always feel that I know what dying means."

Ethel looked at her with a new reverence in her eyes. Was this the stammering, awkward Olive?

"Tell me what you mean," she whispered gently; "I cannot understand. One must die before one can solve the mystery."

"And was I not dying?" returned Olive, in the same dreamy tone. "When I close my eyes I can bring it all back; the faintness, the dizziness, the great circles of light, the deadly, shuddering cold creeping over my limbs, every one weeping round me, and yet beyond a great silence and darkness; we begin to understand what silence means then."

"A great writer once spoke of 'voices at the other end of silence,'" returned Ethel, in a stifled tone. This strange talk attracted and yet oppressed her.

“ But silence itself—what is silence ?—one sometimes stops to think about it, and then its grandeur seems to crush one. What if silence be the voice of God ! ”

“ Dear Livy, you must not excite yourself,” interrupted Richard ; but his tone was awe-struck too.

“ Great thoughts do not excite,” she returned, calmly. She had forgotten Ethel—all of them. From the couch where she lay she could see the dark violet fells, the soft restful billows of green, silver splashes of light through the trees. How peaceful and quiet it all looked. Ah ! if it had only been given her to walk in those green pastures and “ beside the still waters of the Paradise of God ;” if that day which shall be known to the Lord “ had come to her when at eventide it shall be light ;”—eventide !—alas ! for her there still must remain the burthen and heat of the day—ultry youth, weariness of premature age, “ light that shall neither be clear nor dark,” before that blessed eventide should come, “ and she should pass through the silence into the rest beyond.”

“ Aunt Milly, if you or Cardie would read me something,” she said at last, with a wonderful sadness in her voice ; and as they hastened to comply

with her wish, the brief agitation vanished from his face. What if it were not His will ! what if some noble work stood ready to her faltering hand “content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified” “Oh, I must learn to say that,” she whispered.

“Are you tired, Livy ?” asked Richard at last as he paused a moment in his reading ; but there was no answer. Olive’s eyes were closed. One thin hand lay under her cheek, a tear hung on the eyelashes ; but on the sleeping face there lay an expression of quiet peace that was almost childlike.

It was noticed that Olive mended more rapidly from that evening. Dr. Heriot had recommended a change of air ; and as Olive was too weak to bear a long journey, Mildred took her to Redcar for a few weeks. Richard accompanied them, but did not remain long, as his father seemed unwilling to lose him during his last few months at home.

During their absence two important events took place at the vicarage. Dad Fabian paid his promised visit, and the new curate arrived. Poll and Chriss’s letter brimmed over with news. “Every one was delighted with her dear old Dad,” Polly wrote ; “Richard was gracious, Mr. Lamb friendly, and Roy enthusiastically admiring.”

Dad had actually bought a new coat and hat

cut his hair, which Polly owned was a grief to her ; “ and his beard looked like everybody else’s beard,” wrote the girl with a groan. If it had not been for his snuff-box she would hardly have known him. Some dealer had bought his *Cain*, and the old man’s empty pockets were replenished.

It was a real joy to Olive’s affectionate heart to know that Roy’s juvenile efforts were appreciated by so great a man. Mildred, who was almost as simple in worldly matters as her niece, was also a devout believer in Dad Fabian’s capabilities. The dark-lined picture of Cain fleeing from his avenging conscience, with his weeping guardian angel by his side, had made a great impression on her.

Olive and she had long talks over Polly’s rapid scrawls. Roy had genius, and was to be an artist after all. He was to enter a London studio after Christmas. Dad Fabian knew the widow of an artist living near Hampstead who would board and lodge him, and look after him as though he were a son of her own ; and Dad Fabian himself was to act as his sponsor, art-guide, and chaperon.

“ My guardian thinks very highly of Dad,” wrote Polly, in her pretty, childish handwriting. “ He calls him an unappreciated genius, and says Roy will be quite safe under his care. Dad is a little

disappointed Roy's forte is landscape painting he wanted him to go in for high art ; but Roy paints clouds better than faces."

" Dear Roy, how we shall miss him ! " sighed Olive, as she laid the letter down.

" Polly more than any one," observed Mildred thinking how strange it would be to see one bright face without the other close to it.

The new curate was rather a tame affair after this.

" His name is Hugh Marsden, and he is to live at Miss Farrer's, the milliner," announced Olive one day, when she had received a letter from Richard. " Miss Farrer has two very nice rooms looking over the market-place. Her last lodger was a young engineer, and it made a great difference to her income when he left her. Richard says he is a ' Queen's man, and a very nice fellow ; he is only in deacon's orders.' "

" Let us see what Chriss has to say about him in her letter," returned Mildred ; but she contemplated a little ruefully the crabbed, irregular writing, every word looking like a miniature edition of Contradiction Chriss herself.

" Mr. Marsden has arrived," scrawled Chriss " and has just had tea here. I don't think w

shall like him at all. Roy says he is a jolly fellow, and is fond of cricket and fishing, and those sort of things, but he looks too much like a big boy for my taste ; I don't like such large young men ; and he has big hands and feet and a great voice, and his laugh is as big as the rest of him. I think him dreadfully ugly, but Polly says 'No, he has nice honest eyes.'

"He tried to talk to Polly and me ; only wasn't it rude, Aunt Milly ? He called me my dear, and asked me if I liked dolls. I felt I could have smothered him on the spot, only he was so stupid and obtuse that he took no notice, and went on about his little sister Sophy, who had twelve dolls, whom she dressed to represent the twelve months in the year, and how she nearly broke her heart when he sat down on them by accident and smashed ugly."

Roy gave a comical description of the whole thing and Chriss's wrathful discomfiture.

"We have just had great fun," he wrote ; "the Rev. Hugh has just been here to tea ; he is a capital fellow—up to larks, and with plenty of go in him, and with a fine deep voice for intoning ; he is wild about training the choir already. He talked a great deal about his mother and sisters ; he is

an only son. I bet you anything, you women wⁱ be bored to death with Dora, Florence, and Sophⁱ. If they are like him they are not handsome. Or thing I must tell you, he riled Contradiction awfull by asking her if she liked dolls ; she was Pugilis Pug then and no mistake. You should have see the air with which she drew herself up. ‘I suppos you take me for a little girl,’ quoth she. Marsden face was a study. ‘I am afraid you will take he for a spoilt one,’ says Dad, patting her shoulde which only made matters worse. ‘I think yo sister must be very silly with her twelve seasons bursts out Chriss. ‘I would sooner do algebra than play with dolls ; but if you will excuse me, have my Cæsar to construe ;’ and she walked ou of the room with her chin in the air, and even curl on her head bristling with wrath. Marsden sat open-mouthed with astonishment, and Dad wⁱ forced to apologise ; and there was Polly all t time ‘behaving like a little lady.’”

“As though Polly could do wrong,” observed Mildred with a smile, as she finished Roy’s ridiculous effusion.

It was the beginning of October when the returned home. Olive had by this time recovered her strength, and was able to enjoy her rambles.

the sand ; and though Mr. Lambert found fault with the thin cheeks and lack of robustness, his anxiety was set at rest by Mildred, who declared Olive had done credit to her nursing, and a little want of flesh was all the fault that could be found with her charge.

The welcome home was sweet to the restored invalid. Richard's kiss was scarcely less fond than her father's. Roy pinched her cheek to be sure that this was a real, and not a make-believe, Olive ; while Polly followed her to her room to assure herself that her hair had really grown half an inch, as Aunt Milly declared it had.

Nor was Mildred's welcome less hearty.

"How good it is to see you in your old place, Aunt Milly," said Richard, with an affectionate glance, as he placed himself beside her at the tea-table.

"We have missed you, Milly," exclaimed her brother a moment afterwards. "Heriot was saying only last night that the vicarage did not seem itself without you."

"Nothing is right without Aunt Milly," cried Polly, with a squeeze ; and Roy chimed in, indignantly, "Of course not ; as though we could do without Aunt Milly!"

The new curate was discussed the first ing. Mr. Lambert and Richard were in their praises ; and though Chriss mutter herself in a surly under-tone, nobody n her.

His introduction to Olive happened after a what amusing fashion.

He was crossing the hall the next day, c way to the vicar's study, when Roy bade h into the drawing-room and make acquaintanc Aunt Milly.

It happened that Mildred had just left the and Olive was sitting alone, working.

She looked up a little surprised at the tall, shouldered young man who was making hi across the room.

" Royal told me I should find you here Lambert. I hope your niece has recover fatigue of her journey."

" I am not Aunt Milly ; I am Olive," ret the girl, gravely, but not refusing the pro hand. " You are my father's new curate Marsden, I suppose ? "

" Yes ; I beg your pardon, I have made a mistake I see," returned the young man, conf stammering and flushing over his words. "

sent me in to find his aunt, and—and—I did not notice."

"What does it matter?" returned Olive, simply. The curate's evident nervousness made her anxious to set him at his ease. "You could not know; and Aunt Milly looks so young, and my illness has changed me. It was such a natural mistake, you see," with the soft seriousness with which Olive always spoke now.

"Thank you; yes, of course," stammered Hugh, twirling his felt hat through his fingers, and looking down at her with a sort of puzzled wonder. The grave young face under the quaint head-dress, the soft dark hair just parted on the forehead, the large earnest eyes, candid, and yet unsmiling, filled him with a sort of awe and reverence.

"You have been very ill," he said at last, with a pitying chord in his voice. "People do not look like that who have not suffered. You remind me," he continued, sitting down beside her, and speaking a little huskily, "of a sister whom I lost not so very long ago."

Olive looked up with a sudden gleam in her eyes.

"Did she die?"

"Yes. You are more fortunate, Miss Lambert; you were permitted to get well."

" You are a clergyman, and you say that returned, a little breathlessly. " If it were wrong I should envy your sister, who finish work so young."

" Hush, Miss Lambert, that is wrong," said Hugh. His brief nervousness had vanished ; he was quite grave now ; his round, boyish face, and brown with exercise, paled a little with earnestness and the memory of a past pain.

" Caroline wanted to live, and you want to live," he said, in a voice full of rebuke. " She wanted to because she was young, and did not wish to die us, and because she feared death ; and you were sorry to live."

" I have always found life so hard," sighed Hugh. It did not seem strange to her that she should talk thus to a stranger ; was he not a clergyman —her father's curate—in spite of his boyish looks ? " St. Paul thought it was better, you know indeed I am trying to be glad, Mr. Marsden. I have all this time before me."

" Trying to be glad for the gift of life ! " This was a mystery to be solved by the Rev. Mr. Marsden, he who rejoiced in life with the strength of his vigorous young heart ; who loved all living things, man, woman, and child—neither

very dumb animals themselves ; who drank in light and vigour and cheerfulness as his daily food ; who was glad for mere gladness' sake ; to whom sin was the only evil in the world, and suffering a privilege, and not a punishment ; who measured all things, animate and inanimate, with a merciful breadth of views, full of that "charity that thinketh no evil," he to be told by this grave, pale girl that she envied his sister who died.

"What is the matter—have I shocked you?" asked Olive, her sensitiveness taking alarm at his silence.

"Yes—no ; I am sorry for you, that is all, Miss Lambert. I am young, but I am a clergyman, as you say. I love life, as I love all the good gifts of my God ; and I think," hesitating and dropping his voice, "your one prayer should be, that He may teach you to be glad."

CHAPTER V.

THREE YEARS AFTERWARDS.—A RETROSPECT.

“ And still I changed—I was a boy no more ;
My heart was large enough to hold my kind,
And all the world. As hath been apt before
With youth, I sought, but I could never find
Work hard enough to quiet my self-strife,
And the strength of action craving life.
She, too, was changed.”—*Jean Ingelow.*

IN the histories of most families there are long even pauses during which life flows smoothly in uneventful channels, when there are few breaks and fewer incidents to chronicle ; times when the silent ingathering of individual interests deepens and widens imperceptibly into an under-current of strength ready for the crises of emergency. Times of peace alternating with the petty warfare which is the prerogative of kinsmanship, a blessed routine of daily duty misnamed by the young monotony, but which in reality is to train them for the rank and file in the great human army hereafter ; quiescent times during which the memory of past troubles is mercifully obliterated by present ease.

nd "the cloud no bigger than a man's hand" does
ot as yet obscure the soft breadth of heaven's
ue.

Such a time had come to the Lamberts. The
ree years that followed Olive's illness and tardy
nvalescence were quite uneventful ones, marked
ith few incidents worthy of note; outwardly
ings had seemed unchanged, but how deep and
rong was the under-current of each young
dividual life; what rapid developments, what
folding of fresh life and interests in the budding
anhood and womanhood within the old vicarage
alls.

Such thoughts as these came tranquilly to
ildred as she sat alone one July day in the same
om where three years before the Angels of Life
d Death had wrestled over one frail girl, in the
om where she had so patiently and tenderly
rsed Olive's sick body and mind back to health.

For once in her life busy Mildred was idle, the
ork lay unfolded beside her, while her eyes
andered dreamily over the fair expanse of sunny
een dotted with browsing sheep and tuneful with
e plaintive bleating of lambs; there was a crisp
unching of cattle hoofs on the beck gravel below,
light wind touched the elms and thorns and

woke a soft soughing, the tall poplar swayed drowsily with a flicker of shaking leaves ; beyond the sunshine lay the blue dusk of the circling hills, prospect fit to inspire a day-dream, even in nature more prosaic than Mildred Lambert's.

It was Mildred's birthday ; she was thirty to-day, and she was smiling to herself at the thoughts that she felt younger and brighter and happier than she had three years before.

They had been such peaceful years, full of congenial work and blessed with sympathetic fellowship ; she had sown so poorly, she thought, and had reaped such rich harvests of requited love ; she had come amongst them a stranger three years ago, and now she could number friends by the score, even her poorer neighbours loved and trusted her, their northern reserve quite broken down by her tender womanly graces.

"There are two people in Kirkby Stephen that would be sorely missed," a respectable tradesman once said to Miss Trelawny, "and they are Miss Lambert and Dr. Heriot, and I don't know which is the greater favourite. I should have lost my wife last year but for her ; she sat up with her three nights running when that fever got hold of her."

And an old woman in the workhouse said once Dr. Heriot when he wished her to see the vicar : “ Nae thanks to ye, doctor ; ye needn’t bother rsel’ about minister, Miss Lambert has sense enough. I wudn’t git mair gude words nir she es, she’s terrible gude, bless her ; ” and many wuld have echoed old Sally Bates’s opinion.

Mildred’s downright simplicity and unselfishness were winning all hearts.

“ Aunt Milly has such a trustworthy face people are obliged to tell their troubles when they look at her,” Polly said once, and perhaps the girl held the right clue to the secret of Mildred Lambert’s influence.

Real sympathy, that spontaneity of vigorous warm feeling emanating from the sight of others’ pain, is rarer than we imagine. Without exactly giving expression to conventional forms of condolence, Mildred conveyed the most delicate sympathy in every look and word ; by a rapid transit of emotion, she seemed to place herself in the position of the bereaved ; to feel as they felt—the sacred silence of sorrow ; her few words never razed the outer edge of that bitter irritability thatrenches on great pain, and so her mere presence seemed to soothe them.

Her perfect unconsciousness added to this feeling ; there were times when Mildred's sympathy was so intense that she absolutely lost herself. "What have I done that you should thank me ?" was a common speech with her ; in her own opinion she had done absolutely nothing ; she had so merged her own individual feelings into the case before her that gratitude was a literal shock to her, and this same simplicity kept her quiet and humble under the growing idolatry of her nephews and nieces.

"My dear Miss Lambert, how they all love you," Mrs. Delaware said to her once; "even that fine grown young man Richard seems to lay himself out to please you."

"How can they help loving me," returned Mildred, with that shy soft smile of hers, "when I love them so dearly, and they see it? Of course I do not deserve it ; but it is the old story, love begets love ;" and the glad, steady light in her eyes spoke of her deep content.

Yes, Mildred was happy ; the quiet woman joyed in her life with an intense appreciation that Olive would have envied. Mildred never guessed that there were secret springs to this fountain of gladness, that the strongly-cemented friendship between

herself and Dr. Heriot added a fresh charm to her life, investing it with the atmosphere of unknown vigour and strength. Mildred had always been proud of her brother's intellect and goodness, but she had never learnt to rely so entirely on his sagacity as she now did on Dr. Heriot.

If any one had questioned her feelings with respect to the vicarage Mentor, Mildred would have assured them with her sweet honesty that her brother's friend was hers also, that she did full justice to his merits, and was ready to own that his absence would leave a terrible gap in their circle; but even Mildred did not know how much she had learnt to depend on the sympathy that never failed her and the quick appreciation that was almost intuitive.

Mildred knew that Dr. Heriot liked her, he had found her trustworthy in time of need, and he showed his gratitude by making fresh demands on her time and patience most unblushingly: in his intercourse with her, there had always been a curious mixture of reverence and tenderness which was far removed from any warmer feeling, though in one sense it might be called brotherly.

Perhaps Mildred was to blame for this; in spite of her appreciation of Dr. Heriot, she had never

broken through her habit of shy reserve, which was a second nature with her—the old girlish Mildred was hidden out of sight. Dr. Heriot only saw in his friend's sister a gentle, soft-eyed woman, seeming older than she really was, and with tender, old-fashioned ways, always habited in sober greys and with a certain staidness of mien and quiet precision of speech, which, with all its restfulness, took away the impression of youth.

Yes, good and womanly as he thought her, Dr. Heriot was ignorant of the real Mildred. Aunt Milly alone with her boys, blushing and dimpling under their saucy praise, would have shattered all his ideas of primness; just as those fits of wise eloquence, while Olive and Polly lingered near her in the dark, the sweet impulse of words that stirred them to their hearts' core, would have roused his latent enthusiasm to the utmost.

Dr. Heriot's true ideal of womanly beauty and goodness passed his door daily, disguised in Quaker greys and the large shady black hat that was for use and not for ornament, but he did not know it; when he looked out it was to note how fresh and piquant Polly looked in her white dress and blue ribbons as she tripped beside Mildred, or how the

Spanish hat with its long black feather suited Olive's sombre complexion.

Olive had greatly improved since her illness ; she was still irredeemably plain in her own eyes, but few were ready to endorse this opinion ; her figure had rounded and filled out into almost majestic proportions, her shoulders had lost their ungainly stoop, and her slow movements were not without grace.

Her complexion would always be sallow, but the dark abundant hair was now arranged to some advantage, and the large earnest eyes were her redeeming features, while a settled but soft seriousness had replaced the old absorbing melancholy.

Olive would never look on the brighter side of life as a happier and more sanguine temperament would ; she still took life seriously, almost solemnly, though she had ceased to repine that length of days had been given her ; with her, conscientiousness was still a fault, and she would even be given to weigh herself carefully and be found wanting, but there were times when even Olive owned herself happy, when the grave face would relax into smiles and the dark eyes grow bright and soft.

And there were reasons for this ; Olive no longer suffered the pangs of passionate and unrequited love, and her heart was at rest concerning Richard.

For two years the sad groping after truth, the mute search for vocation, the conflict between duty and inclination had continued, and still the grave stern face, kindly but impressive, has given no clue to his future plans. "I will tell you when I know myself, father," was his parting speech more than once. "I trust you, Cardie, and I am content to wait," was ever his father's answer.

But deliverance came at last, when the fetters fell off the noble young soul, when every word in the letter that reached Mr. Lambert spoke of the new-born gladness that filled his son's heart ; there was no reticence.

" You trusted me and you were content to wait then ; how often I have repeated these words to myself, dear father ; you have waited, and now your patience shall be rewarded.

" Father, at last I know myself and my own mind , the last wave of doubt and fear has rolled off me, I can see it all now, I feel sure. I write it tremblingly. I feel sure that it is all true.

" Oh, how good God has been to me ! I feel almost like the prodigal, only no husks could have

satisfied me for a moment, it was only the truth I wanted, truth literal and divine ; and, father, you have no reason to think sadly of me any longer, for 'before eventide my light has come.'

"I am writing more to tell you that it is my firm and unalterable intention to carry out your and my mother's wishes with respect to my profession ; will you ask my friends not to seek to dissuade me, especially my friends at Kirkleatham ? You know how sorely inclination has already tempted me ; believe me, I have counted the cost and weighed the whole matter calmly and dispassionately. I have much to relinquish—many favourite pursuits, many secret ambitions—but shall I give what costs me nothing ? and after all I am only thankful that I am not considered too unworthy for the work."

It was this letter, so humble and so manly, that filled Olive's brown eyes with light and lifted the weight from her heart. Cardie had not disappointed her, he had been true to himself and his own convictions. Mildred alone had her misgivings ; when she next saw Richard, she thought that he looked worn and pale, and even fancied his cheerfulness was a little forced ; and his admission that he had slept badly for two or three nights so filled her with

alarm that she determined to speak to him at all costs.

His composed and devout demeanour at service next morning, however, a little comforted her, as she was hesitating whether the change in him might be her own fancy when Richard himself broke the ice by an abrupt question as they were walking towards Musgrave that same afternoon.

"What is all this about Ethel Trelawny, Aunt Milly?"

And Mildred absolutely started at his tone, it was suppressed and yet so eager.

"She will not return to Kirkleatham for some weeks, Richard; she and her father are visiting in Scotland."

Richard turned very pale.

"It is true, then, Aunt Milly?"

"What is true?"

"That she is engaged to that man?"

"To Sir Robert Ferrers? What! have you heard of that? No, indeed, Richard, she has refused him most decidedly; why he is old enough to be her father!"

"That is no objection with some women. Are you sure? They are not in Renfrewshire, then?"

"They have never been there; they are stayin

with friends near Ballater. Why, Richard what is this ? ” as Richard stopped as though he were giddy and covered his face with his hands.

“ I never meant you or any one to know,” he gasped at length, while Mildred watched his varying colour with alarm, “ but I have not been able to sleep since I heard, and the suddenness of the relief —oh ! are you quite sure, Aunt Milly ? ” with a painful eagerness in his tone very strange to hear in grave, self-contained Richard.

“ Dear Cardie, let there be full confidence between us ; you see you have unwittingly betrayed yourself.”

“ Yes, I have betrayed myself,” he muttered with increasing agitation ; “ what a fool you must think me, Aunt Milly, and all because I could not put a question quietly ; but I was not prepared for your answer ; what a consummate——”

“ Hush, don’t call yourself names. I knew your secret long ago, Cardie. I knew what friends you and Ethel Trelawny were.”

A boyish flush suffused his face.

“ Ethel is very fond of her old playmate.”

He winced as though with sudden pain.

“ Ah, that is just it, Aunt Milly ; she is fond of me and nothing else.”

“ I like her name for you, Cœur de Lion, it

sounds so musical from her lips ; you are her friend, Richard, she trusts you implicitly."

" I believe—I hope she does ; " but drawing his hand again before his eyes, " I am too young, Aunt Milly. I was only one-and-twenty last month."

" True, and Sir Robert was nearly fifty ; she refused a fine estate there."

" Was her father angry with her ? "

" Not so terribly incensed as he was about Mr Cathcart the year before. Mr. Cathcart had doubled his fortune and was a young, good-looking man. I was almost afraid that in her misery she should be driven to marry him."

" He has no right to persecute her so ; why should he be so anxious to get rid of his only child ? "

" That is what we all say. Poor Ethel, hers is no light cross. I am thankful she is beginning to take it patiently ; the loss of a father's love must be dreadful, and hers is a proud spirit."

" But not now ; you said yourself, Aunt Milly, how nobly she behaved in that last affair."

" True," continued Mildred in a sorrowful tone ; " all the more that she was inclined to succumb to a momentary fascination ; but I am certain that with all his intellect Mr. Cathcart would have been

a most undesirable husband for her ; Sir Robert Ferrers is far preferable."

"Aunt Milly!"

"Yes, Richard, and I told her so ; but her only answer was that she would not marry where she could not love. I am afraid this will widen the breach between her and her father ; her last letter was very sad."

"It is tyranny, downright persecution ; how dares he. Oh, Aunt Milly!" in a tone of deep despondency, "if I were only ten years older."

"I am afraid you are very young, Cardie. I wish you had not set your heart on this."

"Yes, we are too much of an age, but she need not fear, I am older in everything than she ; there is nothing boyish about me, is there, Aunt Milly ?"

"Not in your love for Ethel, I am afraid ; but, Cardie, what would her father say if he knew it ?"

"He will know it some day. Look here, Aunt Milly, I am one-and-twenty now, and I have loved Ethel, Miss Trelawny I mean, since I was a boy of twelve ; people may laugh, but I felt for my old playmate something of what I feel now. She was always different from any one else in my eyes. I remember telling my mother when I was only ten that Ethel should be my wife."

"But, Richard——"

"I know what you are going to say—that it all hopeless moonshine, that a curate with four or five hundred a year has no right to presume upon Mr. Trelawny's heiress; that is what he and the world will tell me; but how am I to help loving her?"

"What am I to say to you, Cardie? Long before you are your father's curate Ethel may have met the man she can love."

"Then I shall bear my trouble, I hope, manfully. Don't you think this is my one dread, that an being so young in her eyes? How little she knew how she tempted me when she told me I ought to distinguish myself at the Bar; I felt as though I were giving her up when I decided on taking orders."

"She would call you a veritable Cœur de Lio if she knew. Oh! my poor boy, how hardly this has gone with you," as Richard's face whitened again with emotion.

"It has been terribly hard," he returned, almost inaudibly; "it was not so much at last reluctance and fear of the work as the horrible dread of losing her by my own act. I thought—it was foolish, and young of me, I dare say, but I thought

that as people spoke of my capabilities I might in time win a position that should be worthy even of her. Oh, Aunt Milly! what a fool you must think me."

Richard's clear glance was overcast with pain as he spoke, but Mildred's affectionate smile spoke volumes.

"I think I never loved you so well, Cardie, now I know how nobly you have acted. Have you told your father of this?"

"No, but I am sure he knows; you have no idea how much he notices; he said something to me once that showed me he was aware of my feelings; we have no secrets now; that is your doing, Aunt Milly."

Mildred shook her head.

"Ah, but it was; you were the first to break down my reserve; what a churl I must have been in those days. You all think too well of me as it is. Livy especially puts me in a bad humour with myself."

"I wanted to speak to you of Olive, Richard; are you not thankful that she has found her vocation at last?"

"Indeed I am. I wrote my congratulations by return of post. Fancy Kirke and Steadman

undertaking to publish those poems, and Livy **only** eighteen!"

"Dr. Heriot always told us she had **genius**. Some of them are really very beautiful. Dear Olive, you should have seen her face when the letter came."

"I know; I would have given anything to be there."

"She looked quite radiant, and yet so touchingly humble when she held it out to her father, and then without waiting for us to read it she left the room. I know she was thanking God for it **on** her knees, Richard, while we were all gossiping to Dr. Heriot on Livy's good fortune."

Richard looked touched.

"What an example she is to us all; if she would only believe half the good of herself that we **do**, Aunt Milly."

"Then she would lose all her childlike **humility**. I think she gets less morbidly self-conscious **year** by year; there is no denying she is brighter."

"She could not help it, brought into **contact** with such a nature as Marsden's; that fellow **gives** one the impression of perfect mental and bodily health. Dr. John told me it was quite **refreshing** to look at him."

Chriss amuses me, she will have it he is so
~~sy.~~

"He has a racy laugh certainly, and his voice is t exactly low-pitched, but he is a splendid fellow. Roy keeps up a steady correspondence ith him. By the bye, I have not shown you my st letter from Rome ;" and Richard, who had gained his tranquillity and ordinary manner, dded the thin, foreign-looking envelope from his east-pocket and entertained Mildred for the remainder of the way with an amusing account of me of Roy's Roman adventures.

That night as Richard sat alone with his father in the study, Mr. Lambert placed his hand affectionately on his son's broad shoulder with a look that was rather more scrutinising than usual.

"So the last cloud has cleared away ; that is ght, Cardie."

"I do not understand you, father ;" but the young man faltered a little under his father's quiet glance.

"Nay, it is for you to explain ; only last night u seemed as though you had some trouble on our mind, you were anxious and absorbed, and is evening the oppression seems removed."

For a moment Richard hesitated, and the old

boyish flush came to his face, and then his determination was taken.

"Father," he said, speaking in a quick, resolute tone, and tossing back his wave of dark hair as he spoke, always a trick of his when agitated, "there shall be no half-confidence between us ; yesterday I was heavy at heart because I thought Ethel Trelawny would marry Sir Robert Ferrers ; to-day I hear she has refused him and the weight is gone."

Mr. Lambert gave a low, dismayed exclamation, and his hand dropped from his son's shoulder.

"Ah, is it so, my poor boy ?" he said at last, and there was no mistaking the sorrowful tone.

"Yes, it is so, father," he returned firmly ; "you may call me a fool for my pains—I do not know, perhaps I am one—but it is too late to help it now, the mischief is of too long standing."

In spite of his very real sympathy a smile crossed his father's lips, and yet as he looked at Richard it somehow died away. Youthful as he was, barely one-and-twenty, there was a set determination, a staid manliness in his whole mien that added five years at least to his age.

Even to a disinterested eye he seemed a son of whom any father might be proud ; not tall, the massive, thickset figure seemed made for strength

re than grace, but the face was pre-eminently handsome, the dark eyes beamed with intelligence, forehead was broad and benevolent, the lips still set with the old inflexibility, but the hard lines relaxed : firm and dominant, yet ruled by the gle eye of integral principle ; there was no fear it Richard Lambert would ever overstep the boundaries of a clearly-defined right.

“That is my brave boy,” murmured his father last, watching him with a sort of wistful pain ; “but, Cardie, I cannot but feel grieved that you’ve set your heart on this girl.”

“What ! do you doubt the wisdom or the fitness of my choice ? ” demanded the young man hotly.

“Both, Cardie ; the girl is everything that one could wish ; dear to me almost as a daughter of my own, but Trelewney—ah, my poor boy, do you mean that you can satisfy her father’s ambition ? ”

“I shall not try to do so,” returned Richard, speaking with set lips ; “I know him too well ; he would sell her to the highest bidder, sell his own flesh and blood ; but she is too noble for his corrupting influence.”

“ You speak bitterly, Cardie.”

“ I speak as I feel. Look here, father, foolishly wisely it does not matter now, I have set my

heart on this thing ; I have grown up with this one idea before me, the hope of one day, however distant, calling Ethel Trelawny my wife. I do not think I am one to change."

Mr. Lambert shook his head.

"I fear not, Cardie."

"I am as sure of the faithfulness of my own heart as I am that I am standing here ; young as I am, I know I love her as you loved my mother."

His father covered his face with his hand.

"No, no, do not say that, Cardie."

"I must say what is true ; you would not have me lie to you."

"Surely not ; but, my boy, this is a hard hearing."

"You are thinking of Mr. Trelawny," returned Richard, quietly ; "that is not my worst fear ; my chief obstacle is Ethel herself."

"What ! you doubt her returning your affection ?" asked his father.

"Yes, I doubt it," was the truthful answer ; but it was made with quivering lips. "I dread lest I should not satisfy her exacting fastidiousness ; but all the same I mean to try ; you will bid me God speed, father ?"

"Yes, yes ; but, Cardie, be prudent, remember

✓ little you have to offer—a few hundreds a year
ere she has thousands, not even a curacy!"

" You think I ought to wait a little; another
—two perhaps?"

" That is my opinion, certainly."

Richard crossed the room once or twice with a
id, disordered stride, and then he returned to
father's side.

" You are right; I must not do anything rashly
impulsively just because I fear to lose her. I
ght not to speak even to her until I have taken
lers; and yet if I could only make her under-
nd how it is without speaking."

" You must be very prudent, Cardie; remember
son has no right to aspire to an heiress."

Richard's face clouded.

" That dreadful money! There is one comfort,
elieve she hates it as much as I do; but it is not
ailed property, he can leave it all away from
."

" Yes, if she displeases him. Mildred tells me
holds this threat perpetually over her; poor
, he makes her a bad father."

" His conduct is unjustifiable in every way,"
urned Richard in a stifled voice; " any one less
ole would be tempted to make their escape at all

hazards, but she endures her wretchedness so patiently. Sometimes I fancy, father, that when she can bear her loneliness no longer my time for speaking will come, and then——”

But Richard had no time to finish his sentence for just then Dr. Heriot's knock sounded at the door, and with a mute hand-shake of perfect confidence the father and son separated for the night. —

This conversation had taken place nearly a year before, but from that time it had never been resumed ; sacredly did Mr. Lambert guard his boy's confidence, and save that there was a deferential tenderness in his manner to Ethel Trelawny and a wistful pain in his eyes when he saw Richard beside her, no one would have guessed how heavily his son's future weighed on his heart. Richard's manner remained unchanged ; it was a little grave, perhaps, and indicative of greater thoughtfulness, but there was nothing lover-like in his demeanour, nothing that would check or repel the warm sisterly affection that Ethel evidently cherished for him ; only at times Ethel wondered why it was that Richard's opinions seemed to influence her more than they used, and to marvel at her vivid remembrance of past looks and speeches.

Somehow every time she saw him he seemed less

like her old playmate, Cœur de Lion, and transformed into an older and graver Richard ; perhaps it might be that the halo of the future priesthood already surrounded him ; but for whatever reason it might be, Ethel was certainly less dictatorial and argumentative in her demeanour towards him, and that a very real friendship seemed growing up between them.

Richard was more than two-and-twenty now, and Roy just a year younger ; in another eight months he would be ordained deacon ; as yet he had made no sign, but as Mildred sat pondering over the retrospect of the three last years in the golden and dreamy afternoon, she was driven to confess that her boys were now men, doing men's work in the world, and to wonder, with womanly shrinkings of heart, what the future might hold out to them of good and evil.

CHAPTER VI.

OLIVE'S WORK.

"Read from some humbler poet,
Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer,
Or tears from the eyelids start;
Who through long days of labour
And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
Of wonderful melodies.
Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of ease,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer."—*Longfellow.*

"AUNT MILLY, the book has come!"

Chriss's impetuous young voice roused Mildred from her reverie. Chriss's eager footsteps, her shrill tone, broke in upon the stillness, driving the gossamer threads of fancy hither and thither by the very impetus of youthful noise and movement. Mildred's folded hands dropped apart—she turned soft bewildered looks on the girl.

"What has come? Hush, I do not understand—

," she said, with a little laugh at her own
ilderment.

Aunt Milly, what are you thinking about ? are
asleep or dreaming ?" demanded Chriss, in-
stantly ; " why the book—Olive's book, to be
."

Has it come ? My dear Chriss, how you
tled me ; if you had knocked, it would have
n different, but bursting in upon me like
."

One can't knock for ever," grumbled Chriss,
n aggrieved voice. " Of course I thought you
e asleep this hot afternoon ; but to see you
ng smiling to yourself, Aunt Milly, in that
ravating way and not understanding when one
aks."

Hush ! I understand you now," returned
dred, colouring ; " one gets thinking some-
es, and——"

Your thoughts must have been miles off,
," retorted Chriss, with an inquisitive glance
seemed to embarrass Mildred, " if it took you
that time to travel to the surface. Polly told
to fetch you, because tea is ready, and then
books came—such a big parcel !—and Olive's
d shook so that she could not undo the knots,

and so she cut the string, and Cardie scolded ~~her~~ her."

"It was not much of a scolding, I expect."

"Quite enough to bring Mr. Marsden to the ~~end~~ rescue. 'How can you presume to reprimand ~~a~~ poetess,' he said, quite seriously; you should have ~~ever~~ heard Dr. John laugh. Look here, he has sent ~~you~~ you these roses, Aunt Milly," drawing from under ~~the~~ her little silk apron a delicious bouquet of rose ~~leaves~~ and maidenhair fern.

A pretty pink colour came into Mildred's cheeks.

"What beautiful roses! He must have remembered it was my birthday; how kind of him, Chriss. I must come down and thank him."

"You must wear some in honour of the occasion—do, Aunt Milly; this deep crimson one will look so pretty on your grey silk dress; and you must put on the silver locket, with the blue velvet, that we all gave you."

"Nonsense," returned Mildred, blushing; but Chriss was inexorable.

Dr. Heriot looked up for the minute fair ~~startled~~ startled when Mildred came in with her pin ~~cheeks~~ cheeks and her roses. Chriss's artful fingers, bent on mischief, had introduced a bud among the thick braids, the pretty brown hair looked ~~up~~.

usually soft and glossy, the rarely seen dimple was full play.

"You have done honour to my roses, I see," he said, as Mildred thanked him, somewhat shyly, and joined the group round Olive.

The drawing-room table was heaped over with new-smelling, little green volumes. As Mildred approached, Olive held out one limp soft copy with a hand that shook perceptibly.

"It has come at last, and on your birthday too; am so glad," she whispered as Mildred kissed her.

A soft light was in the girl's eyes, two spots of colour burnt in her usually pale cheeks, her hand closed and unclosed nervously on the arm of her chair.

"There, even Marsden says they are beautiful, and he does not care much for poetry," broke in Richard, triumphantly. "Livy, it has come to this, that I am proud of my sister."

"Hush, please don't talk so, Cardie," remonstrated Olive with a look of distress.

The spots of colour were almost hectic now, the smooth forehead furrowed with anxiety; she looked ready to cry. This hour was full of sweet torment to her. She shrank from this home

criticism, so precious yet so perilous : for the first time she felt afraid of the utterance of her own written voice : if she only could leave them all and make her escape. She looked up almost pleadingly at Hugh Marsden, whose broad shoulders were blocking up the window, but he misunderstood her.

"Yes, I think them beautiful ; but your brother is right, and I am no judge of poetry : metrical thoughts always appear so strange, so puzzling to me—it seems to me like a imprisoned bird, beating itself against the bars of measurement and metres, as though it tried to be free."

"Why, you are talking poetry yourself," returned Richard ; "that speech was worthy of Livy herself."

Hugh burst into one of his great laughs ; in her present mood it jarred on Olive. Aunt Milly had left her, and was talking to her father. Dr. John was at the other end of the room, busy over his copy. Why would they talk about her so ? it was cruel of Cardie, knowing her as he did. She made a little gesture, almost of supplication, looking up into the curate's broad, radiant face, but the young man again misunderstood her.

"You must forgive me, I am sadly prosaic," he

returned, speaking now in a lower key ; "these things are beyond me. I do not pretend to understand them. That people should take the trouble to measure out their words and thoughts—so many feet, so many lines, a missed adjective, or a halting rhyme—it is that that puzzles me."

"Fie, man, what heresy ; I am ashamed of you !" broke in Richard, good-humouredly ; "you have forfeited Livy's good opinion for ever."

"I should be sorry to do that," returned Hugh, seriously, "but I cannot help it if I am different from other people. When I was at college I used to take my sisters to the opera, poor Caroline especially was fond of it : do you know it gave me the oddest feeling. There was something almost ludicrous to me in hearing the heroine of the piece trilling out her woes with endless roulades ; in real life people don't sing on their death-beds."

"Hear him," returned Richard, taking him by the shoulders ; "what is one to do with such a literal, matter-of-fact fellow ? You ought to talk to him, Livy, and bring him to a better frame of mind."

But Hugh was not to be silenced ; he stood up manfully, with his great square shoulders blocking up the light, beaming down on Olive's shrinking

gravity like a gentle-hearted giant ; he was one to make himself heard, this big, clumsy young man. In spite of his boyish face and loud voice, people were beginning to speak well of Hugh Marsden ; his youthful vigour and energy was waking up northern lethargy and fighting northern prejudice. Was not the surpliced choir owing mainly to his persevering efforts ? and were not the ranks of the Dissenters already thinned by that loud-voiced but persuasive eloquence of his ?

Olive absolutely cowered under it to-night. Hugh had no idea how his noisy vehemence was jarring on that desire for quiet, and a nice talk with Aunt Mildred, for which she was secretly longing ; and yet she and Hugh were good friends.

"One can't help one's nature," persisted Hugh, fumbling over the pages of one of the little green books with his big hands as he spoke. "In the days of the primitive Church they had the gift of unknown tongues. I am sure much of our modern poetry needs interpretation."

"Worse and worse. He will vote your 'Song of the Hearth' a mass of unintelligible rubbish directly."

"You are too bad," returned the young man.

with an honest blush ; "you will incense your sister against me. What I really mean is," sitting down beside Olive and speaking so that Richard should not hear him, "that poetry always seems to me more ornament than use. You cannot really have felt and experienced all you have described in that poem—'Coming Back,' for example."

"Hush, don't show it me," returned Olive, hurriedly. "I don't mind your saying this, but you do not know—the feeling comes, and then the words ; these are thoughts too grand and deep for common forms of expression ; they seem to flow of themselves into the measure you criticise. Oh ! you do not understand——"

"No, but you can teach me to do so," returned Hugh, quite gravely. He had laid aside his vehemence at the first sound of Olive's quiet voice ; he had never lost his first impression of her,—he still regarded her with a sort of puzzled wonder and reverence. A poetess was not much in his line he told himself,—the only poetry he cared for was the Psalms, and perhaps Homer and Shakespeare. Yes, they were grand fellows, he thought ; they could never see their like again. True, the " Voices of the Hearth " were very beautiful, if he could only understand them.

"One cannot teach these things," replied Olive with her soft, serious smile.

As she answered Hugh she felt almost sorry for him, that this beautiful gift had come to her, and that he could not understand—that he who revelled in the good things of this life should miss one of its sweetest comforts.

She wondered vaguely over the young clergyman's denseness all the evening. Hugh had stronger developed passion for music, and was further endowed with a deep rich baritone voice. As Olive heard him joining in the family glees, beating time to Polly's nicely-executed pieces, she marvelled all the more over this omitted harmonious in his nature. She had at last made her escape from the crowded, brilliantly-lighted room, and was pacing the dark terrace, pondering over it still when Mildred found her.

"Are you tired of us, Olive?"

"Not tired of you, Aunt Milly. I have scarce spoken to you to-day, and it is your birthday, too, putting her arm affectionately round Mildred, and half leaning against her. In her white dress Olive looked taller than ever. Richard was right when he said Livy would make a fine woman; she looks large and massive beside Mildred's slight figure."

" Dear Aunt Milly, I have so wanted to talk to you all the evening, but they would not let me."

Mildred smiled fondly at her girl; during the last three years, ever since her illness, she had looked on Olive as a sacred and special charge, and as care begets tenderness as surely as love does love, so had Olive's ailing but noble nature gained a larger share of Mildred's warm affections than even Polly's brightness or Chriss's saucy piquancy could win.

" Have you been very happy to-night, dear?" she asked, softly. " Have you been satisfied with Olive's ovation?"

" Oh, Aunt Milly! it has made me too glad; did you hear what Cardie said? it made me feel so proud and so ashamed. Do you know there were actually tears in papa's eyes when he kissed me."

" We are all so proud of our girl, you see."

" They almost make me cry between them. I wanted to get away and hide myself, only Mr. Marsden would go on talking to me."

" Yes, I heard him; he was very amusing; he is full of queer hobbies."

" I cannot help being sorry for him, he must lose so much, you know; poetry is a sort of sixth sense to me."

"Darling, you must use your sweet gift well."

"That is what I have been thinking," laying her burning face against her aunt's shoulders, as they both stood looking down at a glimmer of shining water below them. "Aunt Milly, do you remember what you said to comfort me when I was so wickedly lamenting that I had not died?"

Mildred shook her head.

"I only know I lectured you soundly."

"Oh! Aunt Milly, and they were such dear wise words that you spoke, too; you told me that perhaps God had some beautiful work for me to do that my death would leave unfinished. Do you think" (speaking softly and slowly) "that I have found my work?"

"Dear, I cannot doubt it; no one who reads those lovely verses of yours can dispute the reality of your gift. You have genius, Olive; why should I seek to hide it?"

"Thank you, Aunt Milly. Your telling me will not make me proud, you need not be afraid of that, dear. I am only so very very grateful that I have found my voice."

"Your voice, Olive!"

"Ah, I have made you smile; but can you fancy what a dumb person would feel if his tongue"

were suddenly loosed from its paralysis of silence, what a flow and a torrent of words there would be?"

"Yes, the thought has often struck me when I have read the Gospels."

"Aunt Milly, I think I have something of the same feeling. I have always wanted to find expression for my thoughts—an outlet for them; it is a new tongue, but not an unknown one, as Mr. Marsden half hinted."

"Three years ago this same Olive who talks so sweetly to-night was full of trouble at the thought of a new lease of life."

"It was all my want of faith; it was weak, cowardly. I know it well after all," in a low voice; "to-night was worth living for. I am not sorry now, Aunt Milly."

"What are you two talking about? I am come to pay my tribute to the heroines of the night, and find them star-gazing," broke in a familiar voice.

A tall figure in shining raiment bore down upon them, a confused vision of soft white draperies and gleaming jewels under a cashmere cloak.

"Ethel, is it you?" exclaimed Mildred, in an astonished voice.

"Yes, it is I, dear Mildred," replied the crisp

waves while two soft arms came out from the close and enveloped her. "I suppose I ought to be tired now to Appleby Castle, but I determined since half an hour to myself first, to offer no congratulations to you and this dear girl" (kissed Olive). "You are only a secondary light to-night, Mildred."

"What! have you seen it?"

"Yes; my copy came last night. I sat up half the night reading it. You have achieved a success, Olive, that no one else has; you have absolutely drawn tears from my eyes."

"I thought you never cried over books, Ethel" in a mischievous tone from Mildred.

"I am usually most strong-hearted, but the 'Voices of the Hearth' would have melted a flint Olive, I never thought it would come to this, that I should be driven to confess that I envied you."

"Oh no, Ethel, not that, surely!"

"Ah, but I do! that this magnificent power should be given you to wield over all our hearts, that you should sing to us so sweetly, that we should be constrained to listen, that this girlish head should speak to us so wisely and so well," touching Olive's thick coils with fingers that glittered in the moonlight.

"You must not praise her, or she will make her escape," laughed Mildred, with a glance at Olive's averted face; "we have overwhelmed her already with the bitter-sweet of home criticism, and by and by she will have to run the gauntlet of severer, and it may be adverse, reviews."

"Then she will learn to prize our appreciation. Olive, I am humiliated when I think how utterly I have misunderstood you."

"Why?" asked Olive, shyly, raising those fathomless dark eyes of hers to Ethel's agitated face.

"I have always looked upon you as a gloomy visionary who held impossible standards of right and wrong, and who vexed herself and others by troublesome scruples, but I see now that Mildred was right."

"Aunt Mildred always believes the best of every one," interrupted Olive, softly.

She was flattered and yet pleased by Ethel's evident agitation—why would they all think so much of her? What had she done? The feelings had always been there—the great aching of unexpressed thoughts; and now a voice had been given her with which to speak them. It was all so simple to Olive, so sacred, so beautiful. Why would they spoil it with all this talk?

"Well, perhaps I had better not finish my sentence," went on Ethel, with a sigh; after all it was a pity to mar that unconscious simplicity. Olive would never see herself as others saw her—no fatal egotism wrapped her round. She turned to Mildred with a little movement of fondness—and she dropped Olive's hand, and they all turned back into the house.

"If I have nothing else, I have you," she whispered, with a thrill of mingled envy and grief that went to Mildred's heart.

The music and the conversation stopped as the door opened on the dazzling apparition in the full light. Ethel looked pale, and there was a heavy look round her eyes as though of unshed tears; her manner, too, was subdued.

People said that Ethel Trelawny had changed greatly during the last few years; the old extravagance and daring that had won such adverse criticism had wholly gone. Ethel no longer scandalised and repelled people; her vivacity was tempered with reserve now. A heavy cloud of oppression, almost of melancholy, had quenched the dreamy egotism that had led her to a one-sided view of things; still quaint and original, she was beginning to learn the elastic measurement of

a charity that should embrace a fairer proportion of her fellow-creatures.

But the lesson was a hard one to her fastidiousness. It could not be said even now that Ethel Trelawny had found her work in life, but notwithstanding she worked hard. Under Mildred's loving tuition she no longer looked upon her poorer neighbours with aversion or disgust, but set herself in many ways to aid them and ameliorate their condition. True the task was uncongenial and the labour hard, and the reward by no means adequate, but at least she need no longer brand herself with being a dreamer of dreams, or sigh that no human being had reason to bless her existence.

A great yearning took possession of her as she stood in her gleaming silks, looking round that happy domestic circle. Mr. Lambert had not as yet stolen back to his beloved study, but sat in the bay-window, discussing parish affairs with Dr. Heriot. Richard had challenged the curate to a game of chess, and Chriss had perched herself on the arm of her brother's chair, and was watching the game. Polly, in her white dress, was striking plaintive chords with one hand and humming to herself in a sweet, girlish voice.

"Check-mate; you played that last move carelessly, Marsden. Your knight turned traitor," cried Richard. His handsome profile cut sharply against the lamplight, he looked cool, on the alert while Hugh's broad face was puckered and wrinkled with anxiety.

"Please do not let me interrupt you," exclaimed Ethel, hurriedly, "you look all so comfortable. I only want to say good night, every one," with a wave of her slim hand as she spoke.

Richard gave a start, and rose to his feet, as he regarded the queenly young creature with her pale cheeks and radiant dress. A sort of perfume seemed to pervade him as she brushed lightly past him; something subtle seemed to steal away his faculties. Had he ever seen her look so beautiful?

Ethel stopped and gave him one of her sad, kind smiles.

"You do not often come to see us now, Richard. I think my father misses you," was all she said.

"I will come—yes—I will come to-morrow," I stammered. "I did not think—you would mind me," he almost added, but he remembered himself in time.

His face grew stern and set as he watched her.

in the lamplight, gliding from one to another with a soft word or two. Why was it her appearance oppressed him to-night ? he thought. He had often seen her dressed so before, and had gloried in her loveliness ; to-night it seemed incongruous, it chilled him—this glittering apparition in the midst of the family circle.

She looked more like the probable bride of Sir Robert Ferrers than the wife of a poor curate, he told himself bitterly, as he watched her slow lissom movements, the wavy undulating grace that was Ethel's chief charm, and yet as he thought it he knew he wronged her. For the man she could love, Ethel would pull off all her glistening gewgaws, put away from her all the accessories that wealth could give her. Delighting in luxury, revelling in it, it was in her to renounce it all without a sigh.

Richard knew this, and paid her nobleness its just tribute even while he chafed in his own moodiness. She would do all this, and more than this, for the man she loved ; but could she, would she, ever be brought to do it for him ?

When alone again with Mildred, Ethel threw her arms round her friend.

“ Oh, Mildred ! it seems worse than ever.”

"My poor dear."

"Night after night he sits opposite to me, and we do not speak, except to exchange commonplaces, and then he carps at every deviation of opinion."

"I know how dreadful it must be."

"And then to be brought into the midst of a scene like that," pointing to the door they had just closed; "to see those happy faces and to hear all that innocent mirth," as at that moment Polly's girlish laughter was distinctly audible, with Hugh's pealing "Ha, ha" following it; "and then to remember the room I have just left."

"Hush, try to forget it, or the Sigourneys will wonder at your pale face."

"These evenings haunt me," returned Ethel, with a sort of shudder. "I think I am losing my nerve, Mildred; but I feel positively as though I cannot bear many more of them—the great dimly-lighted room; you know my weakness for light; but he says it makes his head bad, and those lamps with the great shades are all he will have; the interminable dinner which Duncan always seems to prolong, the difficulty of finding a subject on which we shall not disagree, and the dread of falling into one of those dreadful pauses which

hing seems to break. Oh, Mildred, may you
er experience it."

'Poor Ethel, I can understand it all so well.'

Ethel dried her eyes.

'It seems wrong to complain of one's father,
I have not deserved this loss of confidence; he
rying my dutifulness too much.'

'It will not fail you. 'Let patience have her
fect work,' Ethel.'

'No, you must only comfort me to-night, I am
ond even your wise maxims, Mildred. I wish
ad not come, it makes me feel so sore, and yet
ould not resist the longing to see you on your
thday. See, I have brought you a gift,' showing
a beautifully-chased cross in her hand.

'Dear Ethel, how wrong; I have asked you so
n not to overwhelm me with your presents.'

'How selfish to deny me my one pleasure. I
e thought about this all day. We have had
itors, a whole bevy from Carlisle, and I could
t get away; and now I must go to that odious
ty at the Castle.'

'You must indeed not wait any longer, your
nds will be wondering,' remonstrated Mildred.

'Oh no, Mrs. Sigourney is always late. You

are very unsociable to-night, Mildred, just when I ~~I~~ require so much."

"I only wish I knew how to comfort you."

"It comforts me to look into your face and hold ~~your hand~~. Listen, Mildred—to-night I was ~~so~~ hungry and desolate for want of a kind word or ~~to~~ look, that I grew desperate; it was foolish of me ~~to~~ but I could have begged for it as a hungry dog ~~would~~ will beg for a crumb."

"What did you say?" asked Mildred, breathlessly.

"I went and stood by his chair when I ought to have left the room; that was a mistake, was it not?" with a low, bitter laugh. "I think ~~I~~ touched his sleeve, for he drew it away with a look of surprise. 'Papa, I said, I cannot bear this any longer. I do not feel as though I were your child when you never look at me voluntarily.'"

"And what was his answer?"

"'Ethel, you know I hate scenes, they simply disgust me.'"

"Only that!"

"No. I was turning away when he called me back in his sternest manner."

"'Your reproach is unseemly under the circumstances, but it shall be answered,' he said, and his

Oice was so hard and cold. ‘It is my misfortune
hat you are my child; for you have never done
nything but disappoint me. Now, do not inter-
upt me,’ as I made some faint exclamation. ‘I
ave not withheld my confidence, you know my
mbition, and also that I have lately sustained some
ery heavy losses; in default of a son I have looked
o you to retrieve our fortunes, but’—in such a
oice of withering scorn—‘I have looked in vain.’”

“Bitter words, my poor Ethel; my heart aches
or you. What could such a speech mean? Can
t be true that he is really embarrassed?”

“Only temporarily; you know he dabbles in
speculations, and he lost a good deal by those
mining shares last year, that was the reason why
we missed our usual London season. No, it is not
that. You see he has never relinquished the
secret ambition of a seat in Parliament. I know
him so well; nothing can turn him from anything
n which he has set his heart, and either of those
men would have helped him to compass his end.”

“He has no right to sacrifice you to his
mbition.”

“You need not fear, I am no Iphigenia. I could
ot marry Sir Robert, and I would not marry
Mr. Cathcart. Thank Heaven, I have self-respect

enough to guard me from such humiliation. ~~The~~
worst is," she hesitated, "papa is so quick that ~~he~~
found out how his intellect fascinated me; it ~~was~~
the mere fascination of the moment, and died a
natural death; but he will have it I was not in-
different to him, and it is this that makes him so
mad. He says it is obstinacy, and nothing else."

"Mr. Cathcart has not renewed his offer? forgive
me," as Ethel drew herself up, and looked some-
what offended. "You know I dread that man—
so sceptical—full of sophistry. Oh, my dear! I
cannot help fearing him."

"You need not," with a sad smile; "my heart
is still in my own keeping. No," as Mildred's
glance questioned her archly, "I have been guilty
of nothing but a little hero-worship, but neverthe-
less," she averred, "intellect and goodness must go
hand-in-hand before I can call any man my master."

"I shall not despair of you finding them together;
but come, I will not let you stay any longer, or
your pale cheeks will excite comment. Let me
wrap this cloak round you—come."

But Ethel still lingered.

"Don't let Richard know all this, he takes my
unhappiness too much to heart already; only ask
him to come sometimes and break the monotony."

"He will come."

"Things always seem better when he is with me ; he makes papa talk, and much of the restraint seems removed. Well, good-night ; this is sad birthday-talk, but I could not keep the pain in."

As Mildred softly closed the door she saw Richard stand beside her.

"What have you been talking about all this time ?" he asked, anxiously.

"Only on the old sore subject. She is very unhappy, Richard ; she wants you to go oftener. You do her father good."

"But she looked pale to-night. She is not in fresh trouble, is she, Aunt Milly ?"

"No, only the misunderstanding gets more every day ; we must all do what we can to lighten her load."

Richard made no answer, he seemed thinking deeply ; even after Mildred left him he remained in the same place.

"One of these days she must know it, and why not now ?" he said to himself, and there was a strange concentrated light in his eyes as he said it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HEART OF CŒUR-DE-LION.

“At length, as suddenly became aware
Of this long pause, she lifted up her face,
And he withdrew his eyes—she looked so fair
And cold, he thought, in her unconscious grace.
Ah! little dreams she of the restless care,
He thought, that makes my heart to throb apace:
Though we this morning part, the knowledge sends
No thrill to her calm pulse—we are but Friends!”

Jean Ingelow.

MILDRED pondered long and sorrowfully that night over her friend's trouble.

She knew it was no fancied or exaggerated recital of wrongs. The inmates of the vicarage had commented openly on the Squire's changed looks and bearing. His cordiality had always savoured more or less of condescension, but latterly he had held himself aloof from his neighbours, and there had been a gloomy reserve in his manner that had made him well-nigh unapproachable.

Irritable and ready to take offence, and quick to resent even a difference of opinion, he was already

d terms with more than one of his neighbours. Heriot's well-deserved popularity, and his less of speech, had already given umbrage to jealous and haughty temperament. It was said on all sides that the Doctor was a less sent visitor at Kirkleatham House, and that Trewlany was much given to carp at any ssed opinion that emanated from that source. is was incomprehensible, to say the least of he had always been on excellent terms with father and daughter; but little did any one the real reason of so inexplicable a change. hel was right when she acknowledged that tion was her father's besetting sin; the petty ests of squirearchical life had never satiated lominant passion and thirst for power. Side de with his ambition and narrow aims there a vacuum that he would fain have filled with : of a broader type, and with a pertinacity would have been noble but for its subtle sm, he desired to sit among the senators of eople.

vice had he essayed and twice been beaten, it had been whispered that his hands were not e clean, with the cleanliness of a man to whom option is a hideous snare; and still, with a

dogged resolution that ought to have served ~~him~~
he determined that one day, and at all costs, his
desire should be accomplished.

Already there were hints of a coming election and whispered reports of a snug borough ~~that~~ would not be too severely contested; but Mr Trelawny had another aim. The Conservative member for the next borough had given offence to his constituents by bringing in a Bill for the reformation of some dearly-loved abuse. The inhabitants were up in arms, there had been much speechifying and a procession, during which sundry well-meaning flatterers had already whispered that the right man in the right place would be a certain lord of beeves and country squire, to whom the township and people were as dear as though he had first drawn breath in their midst.

Parliament would shortly be dissolved, it was urged, and Mr. Trelawny's chances would be great already his friends were canvassing on his behalf and among them Mr. Cathcart, of Broadlands.

The Cathcarts were bankers and the most influential people, and commanded a great number of votes, and it was Edgar Cathcart who had used such strong language against the aforesaid member for meddling with an abuse which had been suffered

for at least two hundred years and was respectable for its very antiquity.

Ethel's refusal of Edgar Cathcart had inflicted a deadly blow to her father's interests, and one that he was never likely to forgive, all the more that he was shrewd enough to suspect that she had not been altogether indifferent to his fascination of manner.

Now above all things he had coveted this man for his son-in-law. Broadlands and its hereditary thousands would have been no mean match for the daughter of a country squire. With Edgar Cathcart to back him he could have snapped his fingers at the few loyal voters who would have still rallied round their erring townsman, and from a hint that had been lately dropped, he knew the banker was ready at any moment to renew his offer; but Ethel had persisted in her refusal, and bitterly and loudly did her father curse the folly of a girl who could renounce such a position for a mere whim or fancy.

"If you do not love him, whom do you love?" he had said to her, and, courageous as she was, she had quailed before the sneer that had accompanied his words.

But she never guessed the thought that rose in his mind as he said them. "She has some

infatuation that makes her proof against ~~of~~
men's addresses," he argued angrily with him.
"No girl in her senses could be blind to the
attraction of a man like Edgar Cathcart unless she
has already given away her heart. I am not satisfied
about this fellow Heriot. He comes here far
too often, and she encourages him. I always
thought he meant to marry Lambert's prim sister
but he is so deep there is no reading him. I shall
have to pick a quarrel to get rid of him, for if he
once gets an influence over Ethel, all Cathcart's
chances are gone."

Like many other narrow-minded men, Mr Trelawny brooded over an idea until it became fixed and ineradicable. Ethel's warm reception of Dr. Heriot, and her evident pleasure in his society, were construed as so many evidences of his own sagacity and her guilt. His only child and heiress, for whom he had planned so splendid a future, intended to throw herself away on a common country practitioner; she meant to disgrace herself and him.

The wound rankled and became envenomed, steeping his whole soul in bitterness and discontent. He was a disappointed man, he told himself; disappointed in his ambition and in his domestic

affections. He had loved his wife, as such men love, next to himself; he had had a certain pride in the possession of her, and though he had ever ruled her with a rod of iron, he had mingled much fondness with his rule. But she had left him, and the sons, who had been to him as the twin apples of his eyes, had gone likewise. He had groaned and humbled himself beneath that terrible stroke, and had for a little time walked softly as one who has been smitten justly, and the pathos of his self-pity had been such that others had been constrained to feel for him, though they marvelled that his daughter, with the mother's eyes, had so little power to comfort him.

There were times when he wondered also, when his veiled coldness showed rents in it, and he owned to a certain pride in her that was not devoid of tenderness.

"For it was only of late that he had fallen into such carping ways and that the real breach was apparent. It was true Ethel had her mother's eyes, but she lacked her mother's submissive gentleness; never a meek woman, she had yet to learn the softness that disarms wrath. Her open-eyed youth found flaws in everything that was not intrinsically excellent. She canvassed men and manners with

the even immaturity of undeveloped wisdom; she was nothing, naught, everything, and no creature outside that had a stain on its ~~virtuousness~~.

In place of the pliant girlhood he expected, Mr. Trelawny found himself confronted by this daring and ~~reckless~~ Argus. He soon discovered Ethel's finer sympathies were in open revolt against his. It galled him, even in his pride, to see those clear, candid eyes measuring, half unconsciously and half incredulously, the narrow limits of his nature. Whatever he might seem to others, he knew his own child had weighed him in the balance of her harsh-judging youth, and found him wanting.

It was not that her manner lacked dutifulness, or that she ever failed in the outward acts of a daughter; below the surface of their mutual reserve there was, at least on Ethel's part, a deep craving for a better understanding; but even if he were secretly fond of her, there was no denying that Mr. Trelawny was uneasy in her presence; conscience often spoke to him in her indignant young voice; under those shining blue eyes ambition seemed ~~but~~ paltry, and the stratagems and manœuvres of party ~~and~~ spirit little better than mere truckling and the low cunning of deceit.

It would not be too much to say that he almost **feared** her ; that there were times when this sense of uncongeniality was so oppressive that he would **gladly** have got rid of her, when he would rather **have** been left alone than endure the silent rebuke of her presence. Of late his anger had been very **great** against her ; the scorn with which she had **defended** herself against his tenacious will had **rankled** deeply in his mind, and as yet there was **no** question of **forgiveness**.

If he could not bend her to his purpose he **would** at least treat her as one treats a contumacious child. She had spoken words — rash, **unadvisable**, but honest words — which even his little soul had felt deeply. No, he would not **forgive** her ; there should be no confidence, no loving intercourse between them, till she had given **up** this foolish fancy of hers, or at least had brought **herself** to promise that she would give it up ; and **yet**, strange to say, though Dr. Heriot had become a **thorn** in his side, though the dread of him drove all comfort from his pillow, he yet lacked courage openly to accuse her ; some latent sense of honour **within** him checked him from so insulting his **motherless** child.

It so happened that on the evening after

Mildred's birthday, Dr. Heriot called up at K leatham House to speak to Mr. Trelawny on a matter of business.

Richard was dining there, and Ethel's carew face had relaxed into smiles at the sight of favourite; the gloomy room seemed bright somehow, dinner was less long and oppressive awful pauses of silence fell between the father daughter to be bridged over tremblingly. Richa cheerful voice and ready flow of talk—a l forced, perhaps—went on smoothly and even enthusiasm was not possible under the chil restraint of Mr. Trelawny's measured senter but at least Ethel saw the effort and was grat for it.

Richard was holding forth fluently on a t days' visit to London that he had lately paid, w a muttered exclamation from Mr. Trelawny in rupted him, and a moment afterwards the door rang.

A shade of angry annoyance passed over Squire's handsome face — his thin lips cl ominously.

“ What does he want at this time of night? ” demanded, darting a suspicious glance at E whose quick ears had recognised the footst

her bright flush of pleasure faded away at that wrathful look ; she heaved a little petulant sigh as her father left the room, closing the door sharply after him.

"It is like everything else," she murmured.
"It used to be so pleasant his dropping in of an evening, but everything seems spoiled somehow."

"I do not understand. I thought Dr. Heriot was so intimate here," returned Richard, astonished and shocked at this new aspect of things. Mr. Trelawny's look of angry annoyance had not been lost on him—what had come to him? would he quarrel with them all? "I do not understand; I have been away so long, you know," and unconsciously his voice took its softest tone.

"There is nothing to understand," replied Ethel, wearily; "only papa and he are not such good friends now; they have disagreed in politics—gentlemen will, you know—and lately Dr. Heriot has vexed him by insisting on some sanitary reforms in some of the cottages. Papa hates any interference with his tenants, and it is not easy to silence Dr. Heriot when he thinks it is his duty to speak."

"And sanitary reform is Dr. John's special hobby. Yes, I see; it is a grievous pity," assented

Richard, and then he resumed the old topic. It was not that he was unsympathising, but he could not forget the happiness of being alone with Ethel; the opportunity had come for which he had longed all last night. As he talked on calmly and rapidly his temples beat and ached with excitement. Once or twice he stole a furtive glance as she sat somewhat absently beside him. Could he venture it? would not his lips close if he essayed a subject at once so sweet and perilous? As he talked he noted every trick, every gesture; the quaint fashion of her dress, made of some soft, clinging material—it had a Huguenot sleeve, he remembered, for she had told him it was designed from a French picture—and was trimmed with old Venetian point, an oddly-shaped mosaic ring gleamed on one of her long taper fingers and was her only ornament. He had never seen her look so picturesque and yet so sweet as she did that night, but as he looked the last particle of courage seemed to desert him. Ethel listened only absently as he talked; she was straining her ears to catch some sound from the adjoining room. For once Richard's talk wearied her. How loudly the birds were chirping their good-night—would he come in and wish her good-bye as he used to do, and then

ger for an hour or so over his cup of coffee ?
rk ! that was his voice. Was he going ? And,
! surely that was not her father's answering him.
“ Hush ! oh, please hush ! ” she exclaimed,
lding out a hand as though to silence him, and
wing towards the door. “ Oh, Richard, what
all we do ? I knew it would come to this.”

“ Come to what ? Is there anything the matter ?
ease do not look so pale over it.” What had she
ard—what new vexation was this ? But as he
od beside her, even he caught the low, vehement
ies of some angry discussion. There was no
nying Ethel’s paleness ; she almost wrung her
nds.

“ Of course ; did I not tell you ? Oh, you do
t know papa ! When he is angry like this, he
ll say things that no one can bear. Dr. Heriot
ll never come here again — never ! He is
arrelling with all his friends. By and by he will
th you, and then you will learn to hate us.”

“ No, no—you must not say that,” replied
chard, soothingly. With her distress all his
rage had returned. He even ventured to touch
r hand, but she drew it quickly away. She was
t thinking of Richard now, but of a certain kind
end whose wise counsels she had learnt to value.

At least he should not go without bidding ~~her~~ good-bye. Ethel never thought of prudence ~~in~~ these moments of hot indignation. To Richard's dismay she caught her hand away from him ~~and~~ flung open the door.

"Why is Dr. Heriot going, papa?" she asked, walking up to them with a certain majesty of gait which she could assume at times. As she asked the question she flashed one of her keen, open-eyed looks on her father. The Squire's olive complexion had turned sallow with suppressed wrath, the veins on his forehead were swollen like whipcord; as he answered her, the harshness of his voice grated roughly on her ear.

"You are not wanted, Ethel; go back to young Lambert. I cannot allow girls to interfere in my private business."

"You have quarrelled with Dr. Heriot, papa," returned Ethel, in her ringing tones, and keeping her ground unflinchingly, in spite of Richard's whispered remonstrance.

"Come away—you will only make it worse," he whispered; but she had turned her face impatiently from him.

"Papa, it is not right—it is not fair. Dr.

eriot has done nothing to deserve such treatment ;
d you are sending him away in anger.”

“ Ethel, how dare you ! ” returned the Squire.
Go back into that room instantly. If you have
self-respect, and cannot control your feeling, it
my duty to protect you.”

“ Will you protect me by quarrelling with all
y friends ? ” returned Ethel, in her indignant
young voice ; her delicate nostrils quivered, the
lve of her long neck was superb. “ Dr. Heriot
is only told you the truth, as he always does.”

“ Hush, you must not judge your father—after
l, he has a right to choose his own friends in his
vn house—you are very good, Miss Trelawny,
try and defend me, but it is your father’s
arrel, not yours.”

“ If you hold intercourse with my daughter after
is, you are no man of honour——” began the
uire with rage, but Dr. Heriot quietly interrupted
m.

“ As far as I can I will respect your strange
price, Mr. Trelawny ; but I hope you do not
ean to forbid my addressing a word to an old
iend when we meet on neutral ground ; ” and the
entle dignity of his manner held Mr. Trelawny’s

wrath in abeyance, until Ethel's imprudence kindled it afresh.

"It is not fair—I protest against such injustice!" she exclaimed; but Dr. Heriot silenced her.

"Hush, it is not your affair, Miss Trelawny; you are so generous, but, indeed, your father and I are better apart for a little. When he retracts what he has said, he will not find me unforgiving. Now, good-bye." The brief sternness vanished from his manner, and he held out his hand to her with his old kind smile, his eyes were full of benignant pity as he looked at her pale young face; it was so like her generosity to defend her friends, he thought.

Richard followed him down the long carriage road, and they stood for a while outside the lodges. If Dr. Heriot held the clue to this strange quarrel, he kept his own counsel.

"He is a narrow-minded man with warped views and strong passions, he may cool down, and find out his mistake one day," was all he said to Richard. "I only pity his daughter for being his daughter."

He might well pity her. Richard little thought, as he hurried after his friend, what an angry

rricane the imprudent girl had brought on herself; with all her courage, the Squire made her fail and tremble under his angry sneers.

“Papa! papa!” was all she could say, when the first bitter arrow was launched at her. “Papa, say you do not mean it—that he cannot think that.”

“What else can a man think when a girl is foolish enough to stand up for him? For once—yes, for once—I was ashamed of my daughter!”

“Ashamed of me?”—drawing herself up, but beginning to tremble from head to foot—that she, Ethel Trelawny, should be subjected to this insult!

“Yes, ashamed of you! that my daughter should be absolutely courting the notice of a beggarly surgeon—that——”

“Papa, I forbid you to say another word,”—in voice that thrilled him—it was so like her mother’s, when she had once—yes, only once—seen against the oppression of his injustice—“you have gone too far; I repel your insinuation with scorn. Dr. Heriot does not think this of me.”

“What else can he think?” but he blenched a little under those clear innocent eyes.

“He will think I am sorry to lose so good a friend,” she returned, and her breast heaved a little; he will think that Ethel Trelawny hates injustice

even in her own father; he will think what is ~~onl~~ true and kind," her voice dropping into ~~sadn~~ ess, and with that she walked silently from the roo~~m~~.

She was hard hit, but she would not show it; her step was as proud as ever till she had left her father's presence, and then it faltered and slackened, and a great shock of pain came over her face.

She had denied the insinuation with scorn, but what if he really thought it? What if her imprudent generosity, always too prone to buckle on harness for another, were to be construed wrongly—what if in his eyes she should already have humiliated herself?

With what sternness he had rebuked her judgment of her father; with him, want of dutifulness and reverence were heinous sins that nothing could excuse; she remembered how he had ever praised meekness in women, and how, when she had laughingly denied all claim to that virtue, he had answered her half sadly, "No, you are not meek, and never will be, until trouble has broken your spirit: you are too aggressive by nature to wear patiently the 'ornament of a meek and quiet spirit;'" and she remembered how that half-jesting, half-serious speech had troubled her.

Ethel's feeling for Dr. Heriot had been the

rest hero-worship ; she had been proud of his friendship, and the loss of it under any circumstances would have troubled her sadly, she had ever blinded herself to the fact that more than this would be impossible.

Already her keen eyes had lighted on his probable choice, some one who should bring meekness in lieu of beauty, and fill his home with the sunnily sweetness of her smile. "She will be a happy woman, whoever she is," thought Ethel, with sigh, not perfectly free from envy ; there were so few men who were good as well as wise, "and this as one," she said to herself, and a flood of sadness came over her as she remembered that speech about her lack of meekness.

If he could only think well of her—if she had lost caste in his eyes, she thought, it might all be well with her, and in a half-sad, half-jesting way she had pictured her life as Ethel Trelawny always, "walking in maiden meditation fancy free," little solitary, perhaps, a trifle dull, but wiser and better when the troublesome garb of youth was laid aside, and she could—as in very honesty she longed to do now—call all men her brothers. At the proud maidenly reserve was stabbed at all hints ; true, or untrue, Ethel was writhing under

those sneering words. Richard found her on return, standing white and motionless, by window ; her eyes had a plaintive look in them of a wild animal too much hurt to defend its ~~teeth~~ her pale cheeks alarmed him.

" Why do you agitate yourself so ? there is no cause ! Dr. Heriot has just told me it is a mere quarrel that may be healed any time."

" It is not that—it is those bitter cruel words," she returned, in a strange, far-away voice ; " that one's own father should say such things," and then her lip quivered, and two large tears welled slowly to her eyes. Ah, there was the secret stab—her own father !

" My dear Miss Trelawny—Ethel—I cannot bear to see you like this. You are over-wrought—all this has upset you. Come into the air and let us talk a little."

" What is there to talk about ?" she returned dreamily.

He had called her Ethel for the first time since their old childish days, and she had not noticed it. She offered no resistance as he brought a soft fleecy shawl and wrapped it round her, and then gently removed the white motionless fingers that were clutching the window-frame ; as they moved

hand in hand over the grassy terrace, she was quite unconscious of the firm warm pressure ; somewhere far away she was thinking of a forlorn Ethel, whose father had spoken cruel words to her. Richard was always good to her—always ; there was nothing new in that. Only once she turned and smiled at her favourite, with a smile so sad and sweet that it almost broke his heart.

“How kind you are ; you always take such care of me, Richard.”

“I wish I could—I wish I dare try,” he returned, in an odd, choked voice. “Let us go to your favourite seat, Ethel, the sun has not set yet.”

“It has set for me to-night,” she replied, mournfully.

The creeping mists winding round the blue bases of the far-off hills suited her better, she thought. She followed Richard mechanically into the quaint kitchen garden ; there was a broad terrace-walk, with a seat placed so as to command the distant view ; great bushes of cabbage-roses and southernwood scented the air, gilly-flowers, and sweet-williams, and old-fashioned stocks bloomed in the borders ; below them the garden sloped steeply to the crofts, and beyond lay the circling hills. In the distance they could hear the

faint pealing of the curfew bell, and the bleating of the flocks in the crofts.

Ethel drew a deep sigh ; the sweet calmness of the scene seemed to soothe her.

" You were right to bring me here," she said at last, gratefully.

" I have brought you here—because I want to speak to you," returned Richard, with the same curious break in his voice.

His temples were beating still, but he was calm, strangely calm, he remembered afterwards. How did it happen ? were the words his own or another's ? How did it come that she was shrinking away from him with that startled look in her eyes, and that he was speaking in that low, passionate voice ? Was it this he meant when he called her Ethel ?

" No, no ! say you do not mean it, Richard — ! Oh, Richard, Richard !" her voice rising into a perfect cry of pain. What, must she lose him too ?

" Dear, how can I say it ? I have always meant to tell you—always ; it is not my fault that I have loved you, Ethel ; the love has grown up and become a part of myself ever since we were children together ! "

" Does Mildred — does any one know ? " she

ted, and a vivid crimson mantled in her pale cheeks as she asked the question.

"Yes, my father knows—and Aunt Milly. I think they all guessed my secret long ago—all but you," in a tenderly reproachful voice; "why should they not know? I was not ashamed of it," concluded the young man, a little loftily.

Somehow they had changed characters. It was Ethel who was timid now.

"But—but—they could not have approved," he faltered at last.

"Why should they not approve? My father loves you as a daughter—they all do; they would like you into their hearts, and you would never be lonely again. Oh, Ethel, is there no hope? Do you mean that you cannot love me?"

"I have always loved you; but we are too young, you see, that is it, we are too young—too much of an age. If I marry, I must look up to my husband. Indeed, indeed, we are too young, Richard!"

"I am, you mean;" how calm he was growing; only his very voice was under his control now. Listen to me, dear: I am only six months older than you, but in a love like mine age does not count; it is no boyish lover you are dismissing,

Ethel ; I am older in everything than you ; I should not be afraid to take care of you."

No, he was not afraid ; as she looked up ~~into~~ that handsome resolute face, and read there ~~the~~ earnestness of his words, Ethel's eyes ~~dropped~~ before that clear, dominant glance as they ~~had~~ never done before. It was she that was ~~afraid~~ now—afraid of this young lover, so grave, ~~so~~ strong, so self-controlled ; this was not her ~~old~~ favourite, this new, quiet-spoken Richard. ~~She~~ would fain have kept them both, but it must ~~not~~ be.

" May I speak to your father ? " he pleaded. ' At least you will be frank with me ; I have little ' to offer, I know, a hard-working curate's home, and that not yet.'

" Hush ! I will not have this from you," and for a moment Ethel's true woman's soul gleamed in her eyes ; " if you were penniless it would make no difference, I would give up anything, everything for the man I loved. For shame, Richard, when you know I loathe the very name of riches."

" Yes, I know your great soul, Ethel, it is this that I love even more than your beauty, and must not tell you what I think of that ; it is n"

because I am poor and unambitious that you refuse me?"

"No, no," she returned hurriedly; "you know is not."

"And you do not love any one else?"

"No, Richard," still more faintly.

"Then I will not despair," and as he spoke there rushed upon him a sudden conviction, from hence he knew not, that one day this girl whom he was wooing so earnestly, and who was silencing him with such brief sweet replies, should one day be his wife, that the beauty, and the great soul, and the sad yearning heart should be his and no other's, that one day—a long distant day, perhaps—he should win her for his own.

And with the conviction, as he told Mildred long afterwards, there came a settled calm, and a wonderful strength that he never felt before; the world, his own world, seemed flooded over with his great purpose and love of his; and as he stood there before her, almost stooping over, and yet not touching her, there came a vivid brightness into his eyes that scared Ethel.

"Of what are you thinking, Richard?" she said, almost tremblingly.

"Nay, I must not tell you."

Should he tell her? would she credit this strange prophecy of his? dimly across his mind as he stood there before her, there came the thought of a certain shepherd, who waited seven years for the Rachel of his love.

"No, I will not tell you; dear, give me your hand," and as she gave it him—wondering and yet fearful—he touched it lightly and reverently with his lips.

"Now I must go. Some day—years hence, perhaps—I shall speak of this again; until then we are friends still, is it not so?"

"Yes—yes," she returned eagerly; "we must try to forget this. I cannot lose you altogether, Richard."

"You will never lose me; perhaps—yes it will be better—I may go away for a little time; you must promise me one thing, to take care of yourself, if only for the sake of your old friend Richard."

"Yes, I will promise," she returned, bursting into tears. Oh, why was her heart so hard; why could she not love him? As she looked after him walking with grave even strides down the garden path, a passionate pity and yearning seemed to

wake in her heart. How good he was, how noble, how true. "Oh, if he were not so young, and I could love him as he ought to be loved," she said to herself as the gate clanged after him, and she was left alone in the sunset.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHARTON HALL FARM.

“A dappled sky, a world of meadows,
Circling above us the black rooks fly
Forward, backward ; lo, their dark shadow
Flits on the blossoming tapestry.

* * * *
Bare grassy slopes, where kids are tethered
Round valleys like nests all ferny-lined,
Round hills, with fluttering tree-tops feathered,
Swell high in their freckled robes behind.”

Jean Ingelow.

MR. LAMBERT was soon made acquainted with his son's disappointment ; but his sympathy was somewhat chilled by Richard's composed tranquillity of bearing. Perhaps it might be a little forced, but the young man certainly bore himself as though he had sustained no special defeat ; the concentrated gravity of purpose which had scared Ethel was still apparent.

“ You need not be so anxious about me, father,” he said, with almost a smile, in return to Mr. Lambert's look of questioning sadness. “ I have climbed too high and have had a fall, that is all.

I must bear what other and better men have borne before me."

"My brave boy; but, Cardie, is there no hope of relenting; none?"

"She would not have me, that is all I can tell you," returned Richard, in the same quiet voice.

"You must not take this too much to heart; it is my fate to love her, and to go on loving her; if she refused me a dozen times, it would be the same with me, father."

Mr. Lambert shook his head; he was greatly troubled; for the moment his heart was a little sore against this girl, who was the destroyer of his son's peace.

"You may hide it from me, but you will eat out your heart with sadness and longing," he said, with something of a groan. Richard was very dear to him, though he was not Benjamin. He was more like Joseph, he thought, a little quaintly, as he looked up at the noble young face. "Yes, Joseph, the ruler among his brethren. Ah, Cardie, it is not to be, I suppose; and now you will eat out your heart and youth with the longing after this girl."

"Do not think so meanly of me," returned the young man with a flush. "You loved my mother

for three years before you married her, and I only pleaded my cause yesterday. Do you think I should be worthy of loving the noblest, yes, the noblest of women," he continued, his grey eyes lighting up with enthusiasm, "if I were so weakly to succumb to this disappointment. *Laborare est orare*, that shall be my motto, father. We must leave results in higher hands."

"God bless and comfort you, my son," returned Mr. Lambert, with some emotion. He looked at Richard with a sort of tender reverence; would that all disappointed lovers could bear themselves as generously as his brave boy, he thought; and then they sat for a few minutes in silence.

" You do not mind my going away for a little while? I think Roy would be glad to have me?" asked Richard presently.

" No, Cardie; but we shall be sorry to lose you."

" If I were only thinking of myself, I would remain; but it will be better for her," he continued, hesitating; " she could not come here, at least, not yet; but if I were away it would make no difference. I want you all to be kinder than ever to her, father," and now his voice shook a little for the first time. " You do not know how utterly lonely and miserable she is," and the promise given,

Richard quietly turned the conversation into other channels.

But he was less reticent with Mildred, and to her he avowed that his pain was very great.

"I can bear to live without her ; at least I could be patient for years, but I cannot bear leaving her to her father's sorry protection. If my love could only shield her in her trouble, I think I could be content," and Mildred understood him.

"We will all be so good to her for your sake," he returned, with a nice womanly tact, not wearying him with effusion of sympathy, but giving him just the comforting assurance he needed. Richard's fortitude and calmness had deceived his father, but Mildred knew something of the silence of exceeding pain.

"Thank you," he said in a low voice ; and Mildred knew she had said the right thing.

But as he was bidding them good-bye two days afterwards, he beckoned her apart from the others.

"Aunt Milly, I trust her to you," he said, hurriedly ; "remember all my comfort lies in your goodness to her."

"Yes, Richard, I know ; as far as I can, I will be her friend. You shall hear everything from me," and so she sent him away half-comforted.

Half-comforted, though his heart ached with its mighty burden of love ; and though he would have given half his strong young years to hear her say, "I love you, Richard." Could older men love better, nay, half as well as he did, with such self-sacrificing purity and faith ?

Yes, his pain was great, for delay and uncertainty are bitter to the young, and they would fain cleave with impatient hand the veiled mystery of life ; but nevertheless his heart was strong within him, for though he could not speak of his hope, for fear that others might call it visionary, yet it stirred to the very foundation of his soul ; for so surely as he suffered now, he knew that one day he should call Ethel Trelawny his wife.

When Richard was gone, and the household unobservant and occupied in its own business, Mildred quietly fetched her shady hat, and went through the field paths, bordered by tall grasses and great shining ox-eyed daises, which led to the shrubberies of Kirkleatham.

The great house was blazing in the sunshine ; Ethel's doves were cooing from the tower ; through the trees Mildred could see the glimmer of a white gown ; the basket-work chair was in its old place,

under her favourite acacia tree ; the hills looked blue and misty in the distance.

Ethel turned very pale when she saw her friend, and there was visible constraint in her manner.

"I did not expect you ; you should not have come out in all this heat, Mildred."

"I knew you would scold me ; but I have not seen you for nearly a week, so I came through the tropics to look after you," returned Mildred, playfully. "You are under my care now. Richard begged me to be good to you," she continued, more seriously.

A painful flush crossed Ethel's face ; her eyelids dropped.

"You must not let this come between us, Ethel ; it will make him more unhappy than he is, and I fear," speaking still more gravely, "that though he says so little about himself, that he must be very unhappy."

Ethel tried ineffectually to control her emotion.

"I could not help it. You have no right to blame me, Mildred," she said in a low voice.

"No, you could not help it ! Who blames you, dear ?—not I, nor Richard. It was not your fault, my poor Ethel, that you could not love your old

playmate. It is your misfortune and his, that is all."

"I know how good he is," returned Ethel, with downcast eyes. Yes, it was her misfortune, she knew; was he not brave and noble, her knight *sans peur* and *sans reproche*, her lion-hearted Richard? Could any man be more worthy of a woman's love?—and yet she had said him "nay." "I know he is good, too good," she said, with a little spasm of fury against her own hardness of heart, "and I was a churl to refuse his love."

"Hush; how could you help it? we cannot control these things, we women," returned Mildred still anxious to soothe. She looked at the pale girl before her with a feeling of tender awe, now unmixed with envy, that she should have inspired such passionate devotion, and yet remained untouched by it. This was a puzzle to gentle Mildred. "You must try to put it all out of your mind, and come to us again," she finished, with an unconscious sigh. "Richard wished it; that is why he has gone away."

"Has he gone away?" asked Ethel with a startled glance, and Mildred's brief resentment vanished when she saw how heavy the once brilliant eyes looked. Richard would have been grieved as

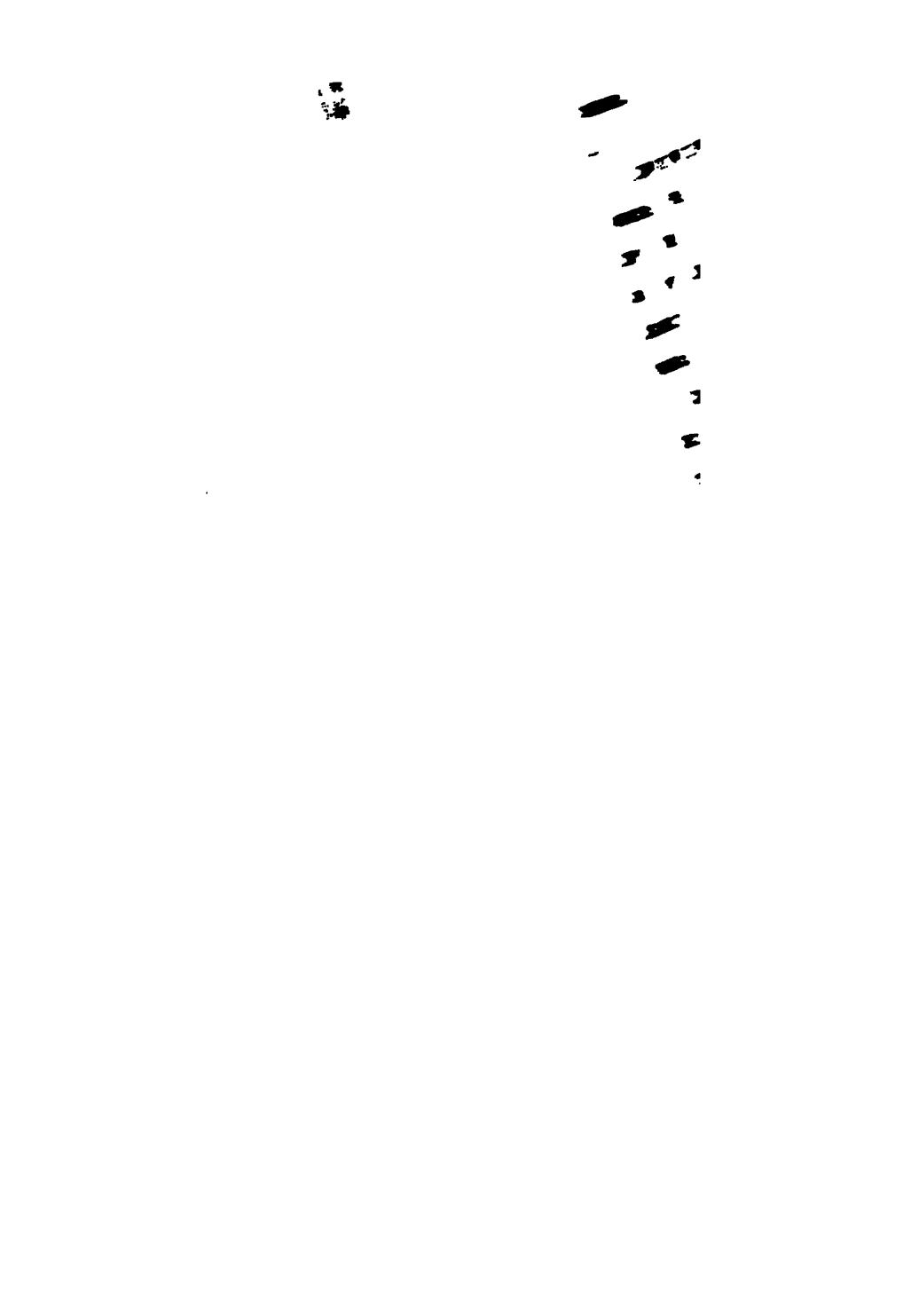
well as comforted if he had known how many tears Ethel's hardness of heart had caused her. She had been thinking very tenderly of him until Mildred came between her and the sunshine ; she was sorry and yet relieved to hear he was gone ; the pain of meeting him again would be so great, she thought.

"It was wise of him to go, was it not?" returned Mildred. "It was just like his kind consideration. Oh, you do not know Richard."

"No, I do not know him," replied Ethel, humbly. "When he came and spoke to me, I would not believe it was he, himself ; it seemed another Richard, so different. Oh, Mildred, tell me that you do not hate me for being so hard, not as I hate myself."

"No, no, my poor child," returned Mildred fondly. Ethel had thrown herself on the grass beside her friend, and was looking up in her face with great pathetic eyes. With her white gown and pale cheeks she looked very young and fair. Mildred was thankful Richard could not see her. "No, whatever happens, we shall always be the same to each other. I shall only love you a little more because Richard loves you."

There was not much talk after that. Ethel's shyness was not easily to be overcome. The sweet



dreamy look had come back to her eyes. Mildred had forgiven her ; she would not let this pain come between them ; she might still be with her friends at the vicarage ; and as she thought of this she blessed Richard in her heart for his generosity.

But Mildred went back a little sadly down the croft, and through the path with the great white daisies. The inequality of things oppressed her ; the surface of their little world seemed troubled and disturbed as though with some impending changes. They were girls and boys no longer, but men and women, with full-grown capacities for joy and sorrow, with youthful desires stretching hither and thither.

“ Most men work out their lot in life. After all, Cardie may get his heart’s desire ; it is only women who must wait till their fate comes to them, sometimes with empty hands,” thought Mildred, a little rebelliously, looking over the long level of sunshine that lay before her ; and then she shook off the thought as though it stung her, and hummed a little tune as she filled her basket with roses. “ Roses and sunshine ; a golden paradise hiding somewhere behind the low blue hills ; the earth, radiant under the Divine glittering smile ; a fragrant wind sweeping over the sea of grass, till it

pled with green light ; ‘and God saw that it is good,’ this beautiful earth that He had made, is, it is good ; it is only we who cloud and mar its lightness with our repinings,” thought Mildred, eaching to herself softly, as she laid the white lids among her ferns. “ A jarring note, a missing word, and we are out of harmony with it all ; and though the sun shines, the midges trouble us.”

It was arranged that on the next day Mr. Ardsden was to escort Mildred and her nieces to Wharton Hall, that the young curate might have opportunity of witnessing a Westmorland tipping.

It was an intensely hot afternoon, but neither Dilly nor Chriss were willing to give up the excursion. So as Mildred was too good-natured to pretend a headache as an excuse, and as Olive was always ready to enact the part of a martyr on an emergency, neither of them owned how greatly they eaded the hot, shadeless roads.

“ It is a long lane that has no turning,” gasped Dug, as they reached the little gate that bounded the Wharton Hall property. “ It is a mercy we’ve escaped sunstroke.”

“ Providence is kinder than you deserve, you see,” observed a quiet voice behind him.

And there was Dr. Heriot leading his horse over the turf.

"Miss Lambert, have you taken leave of your usual good sense, or have you forgotten to consult your thermometer ? "

"I was unwilling to disappoint the girls, that was all," returned Mildred ; "they were so anxious that Mr. Marsden should be initiated into the mysteries of sheep-clipping. Mrs. Colby has promised us some tea, and we shall have a long rest, and return in the cool of the evening."

"I think I shall get an invitation for tea too. My mare has lamed herself, and I wanted Michael Colby's head man to see her; he is a handy fellow. I was here yesterday on business; they were clipping then."

"Mr. Marsden ought to have been here two years ago," interposed Polly eagerly. "Mr. Colby got up a regular old-fashioned clipping for Aunt Milly. Oh, it was such fun."

"What! are there fashions in sheep-shearing?" asked Hugh, in an amused tone. They were still standing by the little gate, under the shade of some trees; before them were the farm-buildings and outhouses; and the great ivied gateway, which led to the courtyard and house. Under the

ey walls were some small Scotch oxen, a peacock siled its feathers lazily in the dust. The air was sonant with the bleating of sheep and lambs; e girls in their white dresses and broad-brimmed hats made a pretty picture under the old elms. ildred looked like a soft grey shadow behind them.

“There are clippings and clippings,” returned Mr. Heriot, sententiously, in answer to Hugh’s half-mused and half-contemptuous question. “This is a very ordinary affair compared with that to which Polly refers.”

“How so?” asked Hugh, curiously.

“Owners of large stocks, I have been told, ten have their sheep clipped in sections, employ a certain number of men from day to day, and provide a certain number of sheep, each clipper mning off seven or eight sheep an hour.”

“Well, and the old-fashioned clipping?”

“Oh, that was another affair, and involved asting and revelry. The owner of a farm like this, for example, sets apart a special day, and bids his friends and neighbours for miles round to assist him in the work. It is generally considered that man should clip three score and ten sheep in a day, a good clipper four score.”

" I thought the sheep-washing last month a very amusing sight."

" Ah, Sowerby tells me that sheep improve more between washing and clipping than at any other period of equal length. Have you ever seen Best's *Farming Book*, two hundred years old? If you can master the old spelling, it is very curious to read. It says there 'that a man should always forbear clipping his sheep till such time as he find their wool indifferently well risen from the skin; and that for divers reasons.'"

" Give us the reasons," laughed Hugh. " I believe if I were not in holy orders I should prefer farming to any other calling." And Dr. Heriot drew out a thick note-book.

" I was struck with the quaintness, and copied the extract out verbatim. This is what old Best says:—

" 'I. When the wool is well risen from the skin the fleece is as it were walked together on the top, and underneath it is but lightly fastened to the undergrowth; and when a fleece is thus it is called a matrice coat.'

" 'II. When wool is thus risen there is no waste, for it comes wholly off without any bits or locks.'

" 'III. Fleeces, when they are thus, are far more easy to wind up, and also more easy for the clippers, for a man may almost pull them off without any clipping at all.'

" 'IV. Sheep that have their wool thus risen have, without

question, a good undergrowth, whereby they will be better able to endure a storm than those that have all taken away to the very skin.'

" You will notice, Marsden, as I did when I first came here, that the sheep are not so clearly born as in the south. They have a rough, almost untidy look; but perhaps the keener climate necessitates it. An old proverb says:—

'The man that is about to clip his sheepe
Must pray for two faire dayes and one faire weeke.' "

" That needs translation, Dr. Heriot. Chriss looks puzzled."

" I must annotate Best, then. And here Michael Dowerby is my informant. Don't you see, farmers like a fine day beforehand, that the wool may be dry—the day he clips, and the ensuing week—that the sheep may be hardened, and their wool somewhat grown before a storm comes."

" They shear earlier in the south," observed Hugh. He was curiously interested in the whole thing.

" According to Best it used to be here in the middle of June, but it is rarely earlier than the end of June or beginning of July. There is an old saying, and a very quaint one, that you should not clip your sheep till you see the 'grasshopper

sweat,' and it depends on the nature of the season —whether early or late—when this phenomenon appears in the pastures."

"I see no sort of information comes amiss to Dr. Heriot," was Hugh's admiring aside to Olive.

Olive smiled, and nodded. The conversation had not particularly interested her, but she liked this idle lingering in the shade; the ivied walls and gateway, and the small blue-black cattle, with the peacock strutting in the sun, made up a pretty picture. She followed almost reluctantly, when Dr. Heriot stretched himself, and called to his mare, who was feeding beside them, and then led the way to the sheep-pens. Here there was blazing sunshine again, hoarse voices and laughing, and the incessant bleating of sheep, and all the bustle attendant on a clipping.

Mr. Colby came forward to meet them, with warm welcome. He was a tall, erect man, with a pleasant, weather-beaten face, and a voice with the regular Westmorland accent. Hugh, as the newcomer, was treated with marked attention, and regret was at once manifested that he should only witness such a very poor affair.

But Hugh Marsden, who had been bred in towns, thought it a very novel and amusing sight.

There were ten or twelve clippers at work, each having his stool or creel, his pair of shears, and a small cord to bind the feet of the victims.

The patient creatures lay helplessly under the hands that were so skilfully denuding them of their fleece. Sometimes there was a struggling mass of wool, but in most instances there was no resistance, and it was impossible to help admiring the skill and rapidity of some of the clippers.

The flock was penned close at hand ; boys caught them when wanted, and brought them to the clippers, received them when shorn, and took them to the markers, who also applied the tar to the wounded.

In the distance the lambs were being dipped, and filled the air with their distressful bleatings, refusing to recognise in the shorn, miserable creatures that advanced to meet them the comfortable fleecy parents they had left an hour ago.

Olive watched the heart-rending spectacle till her heart grew pitiful. The poor sheep themselves were baffled by the noxious sulphur with which the fleece of the lambs were dripping. In the pasture there was confusion, a mass of white shivering bodies, now and then ecstacies, recognition, content. To her the whole thing was a

living poem—the innocent faces, the unrest, the plaintive misery were intact with higher meanings.]

“This miserable little lamb, dirty and woe-begone, cannot find its mother,” she thought to herself. “It is even braving the terrors of the crowded yard to find her; even with these dumb, unreasoning creatures, love casteth out fear.”

“Mr. Colby has been telling us such a curious thing,” said Hugh, coming to her side, and speaking with his usual loud-voiced animation. “He says that in the good old times the Fell clergy always attended these clippings, and acted the part of ‘doctor;’ I mean applied the tar to the wounded sheep.”

“Colby has rather a racy anecdote on that subject,” observed Dr. Heriot, overhearing him. “Let’s have it, Michael, while your wife’s tea is brewing. By the bye, I have not tasted your ‘clipping ale’ yet.”

“All right, doctor, it is to the fore. If the story you mean concerns the election of a minister, I think I remember it.”

“Of course you do; two of the electors were discussing the merits of the rival candidates, one of whom had preached his trial sermon that day.”

Michael Colby rubbed his head thoughtfully.

" Ay, ay ; now I mind.

"' Ay,' says one, 'a varra good sarmon, John,
hink he'll du.'

"' Du,' says John, 'ay, fer a Sunday priest,
grant ye, he's aw weel enugh ; byt fer clippens
kirsns toder 'ill bang him aw't nowt.' "

Mildred was no longer able to conceal that her head ached severely, and, at a whispered request from Polly, Dr. Heriot led the way to the farmhouse.

Strangers, seeing Wharton Hall for the first time, are always struck by the beauty of the old gateway, mantled in ivy, through which is the trim wavy-bordered inclosure, with its comfortable bell-ing-house and low, long dairy, and its pictur-
gue remnant of ruins, the whole forming three sides of a quadrangle.

Wharton Hall itself was built by Thomas Lord Harton about the middle of the sixteenth century, and is a good specimen of a house of the period. Part of it is now in ruins, a portion of it occupied as a farmhouse.

Mrs. Colby, a trim, natty-looking little body, was bustling about the great kitchen with her aids. Tea was not quite ready, and there was a short interval of waiting, in a long, narrow room



her short, almost boyishly-cropped hair, she looked so graceful and piquante that Dr. Heriot's eyes followed her everywhere with unconscious pleasure.

Polly was more than eighteen now, but her hair had never grown properly, it was still tucked behind the pretty little ears, and the smooth glossy head still felt like the down of an unfledged bird ; "there was something uncommon about Polly Ellison's style," as people said, and as Mildred sometimes observed to Dr. Heriot—"Polly is certainly growing very pretty."

He thought so now as he watched the delicate, high-bred face, the cheeks as softly tinted as the roses she wore. Polly's gentle fun always made her the life of the party ; she was busily putting in the sugar with the old-fashioned tongs—she carried the cups to Dr. Heriot and Hugh with saucy little speeches.

How well Mildred remembered that evening afterwards. Dr. Heriot had placed her in the old rocking-chair beside the open window, and had thrown himself down on the settle beside her. Chriss, who was a regular salamander, had betaken herself to the farmer's great elbow-chair ; the other girls and Hugh had gathered round the little table ; the sunshine fell full on Hugh's beaming



upstairs, with a great window, looking over the dairy and garden, and the beautiful old gateway.

"I call this my ideal of a farmhouse," cried Hugh enthusiastically, as they went down the crazy staircase, having peeped into a great empty room, which Polly whispered would make a glorious ball-room.

The sunshine was streaming into the great kitchen through the narrow windows. July was, a bright fire burnt in the huge fire-place; the little round table literally groaned under the dainties with which it was spread; steel forks and delicate old silver spoons lay side by side, the great clock ticked, the red-armed maids went clattering through the flagged passages and dairies, a brood of little yellow chickens clucked and pecked outside in the dust.

"What a picture it all is," said Olive; and Dr. Heriot laughed. The white dresses and the girls' fresh faces made up the principal part of the picture to him. The grand old kitchen, the sunshine, and the gateway outside were only the background, the accessories of the whole.

Polly wore a breast-knot of pale pinky roses; she had laid aside her broad-brimmed hat; as she moved hither and thither in her trailing dress, with

her short, almost boyishly-cropped hair, she looked so graceful and piquante that Dr. Heriot's eyes followed her everywhere with unconscious pleasure.

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face and Olive's thoughtful profile ; how peaceful and bright it all was, she thought, in spite of her aching head ; the girlish laughter pealed through the room, the sparrows and martins chirped from the ivy, the sheep bleating sounded musically from the distance.

"It is an ill wind that blows no one any good," laughed Dr. Heriot ; "my mare's lameness has given me an excuse for idleness. Look at that fellow Marsden ; it puts one into a good temper only to look at him ; he reminds one of a moorland breeze, so healthy and so exuberant."

"We are going to see the dairy," cried Polly, springing up ; "Chriss and I and Mr. Marsden. Olive is too lazy to come."

"No, I am only tired," returned Olive, a little weary of the mirth and longing for quiet.

When the others had gone she stole up the crazy stairs and stood for a long time in the great window looking at the old gateway. They all wondered where she was, when Hugh found her and brought her down, and they walked home through the grey glimmering fields.

"I wonder of what you were thinking when I came in and startled you ?" asked Hugh presently.

"I don't know--at least I cannot tell you,"

returned Olive, blushing in the dusky light. Could she tell any one the wonderful thoughts that sometimes came to her at such hours; would he understand it if she could?

The young man looked disconcerted—almost hurt.

“ You think I should not understand,” he returned, a little piqued, in spite of his sweet temper; “ you have never forgiven me my scepticism with regard to poetry. I thought you did not bear malice, Miss Olive.”

“ Neither do I,” she returned, distressed. “ I was only sorry for you then, and I am sorry now you miss so much; poetry is like music, you know, and seems to harmonise and go with everything.”

“ Nature has made me prosaic and stupid, I suppose,” returned Hugh, almost sorrowfully. He did not like to be told that he could not understand; he had a curious notion that he would like to know the thoughts that had made her eyes so soft and shining; it seemed strange to him that any girl should dwell so apart in a world of her own. “ How you must despise me,” he said at last, with a touch of bitterness, “ for being what I am.”

"Hush, Mr. Marsden, how can you talk so?" returned Olive, in a voice of rebuke.

The idea shocked her. What were her beautiful thoughts compared to his deeds, her dreamy, contemplative life contrasted with his intense working energies? As she looked up at the great broad-shouldered young fellow striding beside her, with swinging arms and great voice, and simple boyish face, it came upon her that perhaps he was the very essence of poetry, the entire harmony of mind and will with the work that was planned for him.

"Oh, Mr. Marsden, you must never say that again," she said earnestly, so that Hugh was mollified.

And then, as was often the case with the foolish fond fellow, when he could get a listener, he descanted eagerly about his little Croydon house and his mother and sisters. Olive was always ready to hear what interested people; she thought Hugh was not without a certain homely poetry as she listened—perhaps the moonlight, the glimmering fields, or Olive's soft sympathy inspired him; but he made her see it all.

The little old house, with its faded carpet and hangings, and its cupboards of blue dragon-chin,

—“bogie-china” as they had called it in their childhood—the old-fashioned country town, the grey old alms-houses, Church Street, steep and winding, and the old church with its square tower, and four poplar trees—yes, she could see it all.

Olive and Chriss even knew all about Dora and Florence and Sophy ; they had seen their photographs at least a dozen times, large, plain-featured women, with pleasant kindly eyes, Dora especially.

Dora was an invalid, and wrote little books for the Christian Knowledge Society, and Florence and Sophy gave lessons in the shabby little parlour that looked out on Church Street ; through the wire blinds the sisters' little scholars looked out at the old-fashioned butcher's shop and the adjoining jeweller's. At the back of the house there was a long narrow garden, with great bushes of lavender and rosemary.

The letters that came to Hugh were all fragrant with lavender, great bunches of it decked the vases in his little parlour at Miss Farrer's ; anti-macassars, knitted socks, endless pen-wipers and kettle-holders, were fashioned for Hugh in the little back room with its narrow windows looking over the garden, where Dora always lay on her little couch.

“ She is such a good woman, they are all such
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good women," he would say, with clumsy eloquence that went to Olive's heart; "they are never sad and moping, they believe the best of everybody, and work from morning till night, and they are so good to the poor, Sophy especially."

"How I should like to know them," Olive would reply simply; she believed Hugh implicitly when he assured her that Florence was the handsomest woman he knew; love had beautified those plain-featured women into absolute beauty, divine kindness and goodness shone out of their eyes, devotion and purity had transformed them.

"That is what Dora says, she would so like to know you; they have read your book and they think it beautiful. They say you must be so good to have such thoughts," cried Hugh, with sudden effusion.

"What are you two young people talkin' about?" cried Dr. Heriot's voice in the darkness. "Polly has quarrelled with me, and Chriss is cross, and Miss Lambert is dreadfully tired."

"Are you tired, Aunt Milly? Mr. Marsden has been telling me about his sisters, and—and—I think we have had a little quarrel too."

"No, it was I that was cross," returned Hugh,

with his big laugh ; " it always tries my temper when people talk in an unknown tongue."

Olive gave him a kind look as she bade him good-night.

" I have enjoyed hearing about it, so you must never call yourself prosaic and stupid again, Mr. Marsden," she said, as she followed the others into the house.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER STENKRITH BRIDGE.

“ I never felt chill shadow in my heart
Until this sunset.”—*George Eliot.*

A FEW days after the Wharton Hall clipping, Mildred went down to the station to see some friends off by the train to Penrith. A party of bright-faced boys and girls had invaded the vicarage that day, and Mildred, who was never happier than when surrounded by young people, had readily acceded to their petition to walk back with them to the station.

It was a lovely July evening, and as Mildred waved her last adieu, and ascended the steps leading to the road, she felt tempted to linger, and, instead of turning homewards, to direct her steps to a favourite place they often visited—Stenkirth Bridge.

Stenkirth Bridge lies just beyond the station, and carries the Nateby road across the river and the South Durham railway. On either side of the road there are picturesque glimpses of this lovely

spot. Leaning over the bridge, one can see huge **f**ragmentary boulders, deep shining pools, and the **s**pray and froth of a miniature cascade.

There is an interesting account of this place by a **c**ontemporary which is worthy of reproduction.

He says, "Above the bridge the water of Eden **f**inds its way under, between, or over some **c**uriously-shaped rocks, locally termed 'brockram,' **i**n which, by the action of pebbles driven round **a**nd round by the water in times of flood, many **s**urious holes have been formed. Just as it reaches **t**he bridge, the water falls a considerable depth **a**to a round-shaped pool or 'lum,' called Coop **K**ernan Hole: the word hole is an unnecessary **e**petition. The place has its name from the fact **t**hat by the action of the water it has been partly **h**ollowed out between the rock; at all events, is **c**up or coop-shaped, and the water which falls into **i**t is churned and agitated like cream in an old-fashioned churn, before escaping through the **f**issures of the rocks.

" After falling into Coop Kernan Hole, the water passes through a narrow fissure into another pool or lum at the low side of the bridge, called 'Span-dub,' which has been so named because the distance of the rocks between which the river ran,

and which overshadow it, could be spanned by the hand.

"We doubt not that grown men and adventurous youths had many a time stretched their hands across the narrow chasm, and remembered and talked about it when far away from their native place; and when strangers came to visit our town, and saw the beautiful river, on the banks of which it stands, they would be hard to convince that half a mile higher up it was only a span wide. But William Ketching came lustng for notoriety, stretched out his evil hand across the narrow fissure, declared he would be the last man to span Eden, and with his walling-hammer broke off several inches from that part of the rock where it was most nearly touching. 'It was varra bad,' says an old friend of ours who remembers the incident; 'varra bad on him; he sudn't hev done it. It was girt curiosity to span Eden.'"

Mildred had an intense affection for this beautiful spot. It was the scene of many a merry gipsy-tea; and in the summer Olive and she often made it their resort, taking their work or books and spending long afternoons there.

This evening she would enjoy it alone, "with only pleasant thoughts for company," she said to

herself, as she strolled contentedly down the smooth green glade, where browsing cattle only broke the silence, and then made her way down the bank to the river-side.

Here she sat down, rapt for a time by the still beauty of the place. Below her, far as she could see, lay the huge grey and white stones through which the water worked its channel. Low trees and shrubs grew in picturesque confusion—dark lichen-covered rocks towered, jagged and massive, on either side of the narrow chasm. Through the arch of the bridge one saw a vista of violet-blue sky and green foliage. The rush of the water into Coop Kernan Hole filled the ear with soft incessant sound. Some one beside Mildred seemed rooted to the spot.

“This is a favourite place with you, I know,” said a voice in her ear; and Mildred, roused from her dreams, started, and turned round, blushing with the sudden surprise.

“Dr. Heriot, how could you? You have startled me dreadfully!”

“Did you not see me coming?” he returned, jumping lightly from one rock to the other, and settling himself comfortably a little below her. “I saw you at the station and followed you here. Do

I intrude on pleasanter thoughts ?" he continued ~~bad~~, giving her the benefit of one of his keen, quiet glances.

" No ; oh, no," stammered Mildred. All at once ~~once~~ she felt ill at ease. The situation was novel—unexpected. She had often encountered Dr. ~~Mr.~~ Heriot in her walks and drives, but he had never ~~so~~ so frankly sought her out as on this evening. His ~~his~~ manner was the same as usual—friendly, self-~~confident~~ possessed—but for the first time in her life Mildred ~~had~~ was tormented with a painful self-consciousness. Her slight confusion was unnoticed, however, for ~~for~~ Dr. Heriot went on in the same cool, well-assured ~~bold~~ voice,

" You are such a comfortable person, Miss Lambert, one can always depend on hearing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth from you. I confess I should have been grievously disappointed if you had sent me about my own business."

" Am I given to dismiss you in such a churlish manner, Dr. Heriot ?" returned Mildred, with a little nervous laugh ; but she only thought, " How strange of him to follow me here ! "

" You are the soul of courtesy itself ; you have a benevolent forehead, Miss Lambert. ' Entertain—

gent for Pilgrims' ought to be bound round it as sort of phylactery. Why are women so much more unselfish than men, I wonder?"

"They need something to compensate them for their weakness," she returned, softly.

"Their weakness is strength sometimes, and masters our brute force. I am in the mood for moralising, you see. Last Sunday evening I was reading my *Pilgrim's Progress*. I have retained my old childish penchant for it. Apollyon with his darts was my favourite nightmare for years. When I came to the part about Charity and the Palace Beautiful, I thought of you."

Mildred raised her eyes in surprise, and again the sensitive colour rose to her face. Dr. Heriot was given to moralising, she knew, but it was a little forced this evening. In spite of his coolness suppressed excitement bordered the edge of his words; he looked like a man on the brink of a resolution.

"The damsel Discretion would suit me better," he said at last, with assumed lightness.

"Yes, Discretion is your handmaid, but my name ts you more truly," he returned, with a kind look which somehow made her heart beat faster. "Your sympathy offers such a soft pillow for sore hearts,

and aches and troubles—have you a ward for incurables, as well as for the sick and maimed waifs and strays of humanity, I wonder?"

"Dr. Heriot, what possesses you this evening?" returned Mildred, with troubled looks. How strangely he was talking!—was he in fun or earnest? Ought she to stay there and listen to him, or should she gently hint to him the expediency of returning home? A dim instinct warned her that this hour might be fraught with perilous pleasure; a movement would break its spell. She rose hastily.

"You are not going?" he exclaimed, raising himself in some surprise; "it is still early. This is an ungrateful return for the compliment I have just paid you. I am certain it is Discretion now, and not Charity, that speaks."

"They will be expecting me," she returned. Dr. Heriot had risen to his feet, and now stretched out his hand to detain her.

"They do not want you," he said, with a persuasive smile; "they can exist an hour without Aunt Milly. Sit down again, Charity, I entreat you, for I have followed you here to ask your advice. I really need it," he continued, seriously, as Mildred still hesitated; but a glance at the grave, kind face decided her. "Perhaps, after a

he had some trouble, and she might help him. It could be no harm ; it was only too pleasant to be sitting there monopolising his looks and words, usually shared with others. The opportunity might never occur again. She would stop and hear all that he had to say. Was he not her brother's friend, and hers also ? ”

Dr. Heriot seemed in no hurry to explain himself ; he sat throwing pebbles absently into the water fissures at their feet, while Mildred watched him with some anxiety. Time had dealt very gently with Dr. Heriot ; he looked still young, in the prime of life. A close observer might notice that the closely-cropped hair was sprinkled with grey, but the lines that trouble had drawn were almost effaced by the kindly hand of time. There was still a melancholy shade in the eyes, an occasional dash of bitterness in the kind voice, but the trouble lay far back and hidden ; and it could not be denied that Dr. Heriot was visibly happier than he had been three years ago. Yes, it was true, sympathy had smoothed out many a furrow ; kindly fellowship and close intimacy had brightened the life of the lonely man ; little discrepancies and angles had vanished under beneficent treatment. The young fresh lives around him, with their

passionate interests, their single-eyed pursuits, lent him new interests, and fostered that superabundant benevolence ; and Hope and its twin-sister Desire bloomed by the side of his desolate hearth.

Dr. Heriot had ever told himself that passion was dead within him, slain by that deadly disgust and terror of years. “A man cannot love twice as I loved Margaret,” he had said to his friend more than once ; and the two men, drawn together by a loss so similar, and yet so diverse, had owned that in their case, and with their faithful tenacity, no second love could be possible.

“But you are a comparatively young man ; you are in the very prime of life, Heriot ; you ought to marry,” his friend had said to him once.

“I do not care to marry for friendship and companionship,” he had answered. “My wife must be everything or nothing to me. I must love with passion or not at all.” And there had risen up before his mind the dreary spectacle of a degraded beauty that he once had worshipped, and which had power to charm him to the very last.

It was three years since Dr. Heriot had uttered his bitter protest against matrimony, and since then there had grown up in his heart a certain sweet fancy, which had emanated first out of pure benevo-

lence, but which, while he cherished and fostered it, had grown very dear to him.

He was thinking of it now, as the pebbles splashed harmlessly in the narrow rivulets, while Mildred watched him, and thought with curious incongruity of the dark, sunless pool lying behind the grey rocks, and of the wild churning and seething of foamy waters which seemed to deaden their voices ; would he ever speak, she wondered. She sat with folded hands, and a soft, perplexed smile on her face, as she waited, listening to the dreamy rush of the water.

He roused himself at last in earnest.

“ How good you are to me, Miss Lambert. After all, I have no right to tax your forbearance.”

“ All friends have a right,” was the low answer.

“ All friends, yes. I wonder what any very special friend dare claim from you ? I could fancy your goodness without stint or limit then ; it would bear comparison with the deep waters of Coop Kernan Hole itself.”

“ Then you flatter me ;” but she blushed, yes, to her sorrow, as Mildred rarely blushed.

“ You see I am disposed to shelter myself beside it. Miss Lambert, I need not ask you—you know my trouble.”

"Your trouble? Oh, yes; Arnold told me."

"And you are sorry for me?"

"More than I can say," and Mildred's voice trembled a little, and the tears came to her eyes. With a sort of impulse she stretched out her hand to him—that beautiful woman's hand he had so often admired.

"Thank you," he returned, gratefully, and holding it in his. "Miss Lambert, I feel you are my friend; that I dare speak to you. Will you give me your advice to-night, as though—as though you were my sister?"

"Can you doubt it?" in a voice so low that it was almost inaudible. A slight, almost imperceptible shiver passed over her frame, but her mind glance still rested on his averted face; some subtle sadness that was not pain seemed creeping over her; somewhere there seemed a void opened, an empty space, filled with a dying light. Mildred never knew what ailed her at that moment, only, as she sat there with her hands once more folded in her lap, she thought again of the dark, sunless pool lying behind the grey rocks, and of the grawsome cavern, where the churned and seething waters worked their way to the light.

Somewhere from the distance Dr. Heriot's voice seemed to rouse her.

"You are so good and true yourself, that you inspire confidence. A man dare trust you with his dearest secret, and yet feel no dread of betrayal; you are so gentle and so unselfish, that others lay their burthens at your feet."

"Hush; please don't praise me. I have done nothing—nothing—that any other woman would not have done," returned Mildred, in a constrained tone. She shrank from this praise. Somehow it wounded her sensibility. He must talk of his trouble and not her, and then, perhaps, she would grow calm again, more like the wise, self-controlled Mildred he thought her.

"I only want to justify the impulse that bade me follow you just now," he returned, with gentle gravity. "You shall not lose the fruit of your humility through me, Miss Lambert. I am glad you know my sad story, it makes my task an easier one."

"You must have suffered greatly, Dr. Heriot."

"Ah, have I not?" catching his breath quickly. "You do not know, how can you, how a man of my nature loves the woman he has made his wife."

"She must have been very beautiful." The words escaped from Mildred before she was aware.

"Beautiful," he returned, in a tone of gloom—my triumph. "I never saw a face like hers, never; but it was not her beauty only that I loved; it was herself—her real self—as she was to others, never to me. You may judge the power of her fascination, when I tell you that I loved her to the last in spite of all—ay, in spite of all—and though she murdered my happiness. Oh, the heaven our home might have been, if our boy had lived," speaking more to himself than to her, but her calm voice recalled him.

"Time heals even these terrible wounds."

"Yes, time and the kindness of friends. I was not ungrateful, even in my loneliness. Since Margaret died, I have been thankful for moderate blessings, but now they cease to content me: in spite of my resolve never to call another woman my wife, I am growing strangely restless and lonely."

"You have thought of some one; you want my advice, my assistance, perhaps." Would those churning waters never be still? A fine trembling passed through the folded fingers, but the sweet, quiet tones did not falter. Were there two Mildreds, one suffering a new, unknown pain;

the other sitting quietly on a grey boulder, with
the water lapping to her very feet.

"Yes, I have thought of some one," was the
steady answer. "I have thought of my ward."

"Polly!" Ah, surely those seething waters
must burst their bounds now, and overwhelm them
with a noisy flood. Was she dreaming? Did she
hear him aright?

"Yes, Polly—my bright-faced Polly. Miss
Lambert, you must not grow pale over it; I am
not robbing Aunt Milly of one of her children.
Polly belongs to me."

"As thy days so shall thy strength be;" the
words seemed to echo in her heart. Mildred could
make nothing of the pain that had suddenly seized
on her; some unerring instinct warned her to
defer inquiry. Aunt Milly!—yes, she was only
Aunt Milly, and nothing else.

"You are right; Polly belongs to you," she said,
looking at him with wistful eyes, out of which the
tender, shining light seemed somehow faded, "but
you must not sacrifice yourself for all that," she
continued, with the old-fashioned wisdom he had
ever found in her.

"There you wrong me; it will be no sacrifice,"
he returned, eagerly. "Year by year Polly has been

growing very dear to me. I have watched her closely ; you could not find a sweeter nature anywhere."

"She is worthy of a good man's love," returned Mildred, in the same calm, impassive tone.

"You are so patient that I must not stint my confidence," he exclaimed. "I must tell you that for the last two years this thought has been growing up in my heart, at first with reluctant anxiety, but lately with increasing delight. I love Polly very dearly, Miss Lambert ; all the more, that she is so dependent on me."

Mildred did not answer, but evidently Dr. Heriot found her silence sympathetic, for he went on in the same absorbed tone—

"I do not deny that at one time the thought gave me pain, and that I doubted my ability to carry out my plan, but now it is different. I love her well enough to wish to be her protector ; well enough to redeem her father's trust. In making this young orphan my wife, I shall console myself ; my conscience and my heart will be alike satisfied."

"She is very young," began Mildred, but he interrupted her a little sadly.

"That is my only remaining difficulty—she is so young. The discrepancy in our ages is so

apparent. I sometimes doubt whether I am right in asking her to sacrifice herself."

A strange smile passed over Mildred's face.
"Are you sure she will regard it in that light, Dr. Heriot?"

"What do you think?" he returned, eagerly.
"It is there I want your advice. I am not disinterested. I fear my own selfishness, my hearth is so lonely. Think how this young girl, with her sweet looks and words, will brighten it. Dare I venture it? Is Polly to be won?"

"She is too young to have formed another attachment," mused Mildred. "As far as I know, she is absolutely free; but I cannot tell, it is not always easy to read girls." A fleeting thought of Roy, and a probable childish entanglement, passed through Mildred's mind as she spoke, but the next moment it was dismissed as absurd. They were on excellent terms, it was true, but Polly's frank, sisterly affection was too openly expressed to excite suspicion, while Roy's flirtations were known to be legion. A perfectly bewildering number of Christian names were carefully entered in Polly's pocket-book, annotated by Roy himself. Polly was cognisant of all his love affairs, and alternately coaxed and scolded him out of his secrets.

"And you think she could be induced to care — for her old guardian?" asked Dr. Heriot, and — there was no mistaking the real anxiety of his — tone.

"Why do you call yourself old?" returned — Mildred, almost brusquely. "If Polly be fond of — you, she will not find fault with your years. Most — men do not call themselves old at eight-and-thirty."

"But I have not led the life of most men," was — the sorrowful reply. "Sometimes I fear a bright — young girl will be no mate for my sadness."

"It has not turned you into a misanthrope; — you must not be discouraged, Dr. Heriot; trouble — has made you faint-hearted. The best of your life — lies before you, you may be sure of that."

"You know how to comfort, Miss Lambert. — You lull fears to sleep so sweetly that they never — wake again. You will wish me success, then?"

"Yes, I will wish you success," she returned, — with a strange melancholy in her voice. Was it for her to tell him that he was deceiving himself; that benevolence and fancy were painting for him a future that could never be verified?

He would take this young girl into the shelter of his honest heart, but would he satisfy her, would he satisfy himself?

Would his hearth be always warm and bright when she bloomed so sweetly beside it; would her innocent affection content this man, with his deep, passionate nature, and yearning heart; would there be no void that her girlish intellect could not fill?

Alas! she knew him too well to lay such flattering unction to her soul; and she knew Polly too. Polly would be no child-wife, to be fed with caresses. Her healthy woman's nature would crave her husband's confidence without stint and limit; there must be response to her affection, an answer to every appeal.

"I will wish you success," she had said to him, and he had not detected the sadness of her tone, only as he turned to thank her she had risen quickly to her feet.

"Is it so late? I ought not to have kept you so long," he exclaimed, as he followed her.

"Yes, the sun has set," returned Mildred hurriedly; but as they walked along side by side she suddenly hesitated and stopped. She had an odd fancy, she told him, but she wanted to see the dark pool on the other side of the grey rock, Coop Kernan Hole she thought they called it, for through all their talk it had somehow haunted her.

"If you will promise me not to go too near," I had answered, "for the boulders are apt to be slippery at times."

And Mildred had promised.

He was a little surprised when she refused his assistance and clambered lightly from one huge boulder to another, and still more at her quiet intensity of gaze into the black sullen pool. She was so unlike Mildred—cheerful Mildred—to care about such places.

The sunset had quite died away, but sombre angry, lurid clouds still lingered westward; the air was heavy and oppressed, no breeze stirred the birches and aspens; below them lay Coop Kern Hole, black and fathomless, above them the pent-up water leaped over the rocks with white resistless force.

"We shall have a storm directly; this place looks weird and uncanny to-night; let us go."

"Yes, let us go," returned Mildred, with a slight shiver. "What is there to wait for?" Whom indeed?

She did not now refuse the assistance that Dr Heriot offered her; her energy was spent, she looked white and somewhat weary when they reached the little gate. Dr. Heriot noticed it.

"You look as if you had seen a ghost. I shall not bring you to this place again in the gloaming," he said lightly; and Mildred had laughed too.

What had she seen?

Only a sunless pool, with night closing over it; only grey rocks, washed evermore with a foaming torrent; only a yawning chasm, through which churning waters seethed and worked their way, where a dying light could not enter; and above thunder-clouds, black with an approaching storm.

"Yes, I shall come again; not now, not for a long time, and you shall bring me," she had answered him, with a smile so sweet and singular that it had haunted him.

True prophetic words, but little did Mildred know when and how she would stand beside Coop Kernan Hole again.

CHAPTER X.

DR. HERIOT'S WARD.

“I can pray with pureness
For her welfare now—
Since the yearning waters
Bravely were pent in.
God—He saw me cover,
With a careless brow,
Signs that might have told her
Of the work within.”

Philip Stanhope Worsley.

THE pretty shaded lamps were lighted in the drawing-room; a large grey moth had flown in through the open windows and brushed round them in giddy circles. Polly was singing a little plaintive French air, Roy's favourite. *Tra-la-la, Qui va la*, it went on, with odd little trills and drawn-out chords. Olive's book had dropped to her lap, one long braid of hair had fallen over her hot cheek. Mildred's entrance had broken the thread of some quiet dream,—she uttered an exclamation and Polly's music stopped.

“Dear Aunt Milly, how late you are, and how tired you look !”

"Yes, I am tired, children. I have been to Stenkirth, and Dr. Heriot found me, and we have had a long talk. I think I have missed my tea, and——"

"Aunt Milly, you look dreadful," broke in Polly, impulsively; "you must sit there," pushing her with gentle force into the low chair, "and I shall go and bring you some tea, and you are not to talk."

Mildred was only too thankful to submit; she leant back wearily upon the cushions Polly's thoughtfulness had provided, with an odd feeling of thankfulness and unrest;—how good her girls were to her. She watched Polly coming across the room, slim and tall, carrying the little tea-tray, her long dress flowing out behind her with gentle undulating movement. The lamp-light shone on the purple cup, and the softly-tinted peach lying beside it, placed there by Polly's soft little fingers; she carried a little filagree-basket, a mere toy of a thing, heaped up with queen's-cakes; a large creamy rose detached itself from her dress and fell on Mildred's lap.

"This is the second time you have shivered, and yet your hands are warm—oh, so warm," said the girl anxiously, as she hung over her.

Mildred smiled and roused herself, and tried to do justice to the little feast.

"They had all had a busy day," she said with a yawn, and stretching herself.

The vicarage had been a Babel since early morning, with all those noisy tongues. Yes, the tea had refreshed her, but her head still ached, and she thought it would be wiser to go to bed.

"Please do go, Aunt Milly," Olive had chimed in, and when she had bidden them good-night, she heard Polly's flute-like voice bursting into *Tra-la-la* again as she closed the door ; *Qui va là* she hummed to herself as she crept wearily along.

The storm had broken some miles below them, and only harmless summer lightning played on the ragged edges of the clouds as they gleamed fitfully, now here, now there ; there were sudden glimpses of dark hills and a grey, still river with some cattle grouped under the bridge, and then darkness.

"How strange to shiver in such heat," thought Mildred, as she sat down by the open window. She scarcely knew why she sat there—"Only for a few minutes just to think it all out," she said to herself, as she pressed her aching forehead between her hands ; but hours passed and still she did not move.

Years afterwards Mildred was once asked which was the bitterest hour of her life, and she had grown suddenly pale and the answer had died away on her lips ; the remembrance of this night had power to kill her even then.

A singular conflict was raging in Mildred's gentle bosom, passions hitherto unknown stirred and agitated it ; the poor Soul dragged before the tribunal of inexorable womanhood had pleaded guilty to a crime that was yet no crime—the sin of leaving loved unsought.

Unconsciousness could shield her no longer, the beneficent cloak of friendship could not cover her ; mutual sympathy, the united strength of goodness and intellect, her own pitying woman's heart had wrought the mischief under which she was now writhing with an intolerable sense of terror and shame.

And how intolerable can only be known by any pure-minded woman under the same circumstances ! It would not be too much to say that Mildred absolutely cowered under it, tranquillity was broken up, the brain, calm and reasonable no longer, grew feverish with the effort to piece together tormenting fragments of recollection.

Had she betrayed herself ? How had she sinned

if she had so sinned? What had she done that ~~but~~ the agony of this humiliation had come upon her, ~~as~~, she who had thought of others, never of herself?

Was this the secret of her false peace? was her ~~whole~~ life indeed robbed of its sweetest illusion, she who ~~had~~ had hoped for nothing, expected nothing? would ~~she~~ she now go softly all her days as one who had lost ~~all~~ her chief good?

And yet what had she desired—but to keep him ~~on~~ as her friend? was not this the sum and head of ~~of~~ her offending?

“Oh, God, Thou knowest my integrity,” she cried ~~in~~ from the depths of her suffering soul.

Alas! was it her fault that she loved him? ~~or~~ was it only her fancy that some sympathy, subtle ~~and~~ but profound, united them? was it not he who ~~had~~ deceived himself? Ah, there was the stab. She ~~now~~ knew now that she was nothing to him and he was ~~all~~ everything to her.

Her very unconsciousness had prepared this snare for her. She had called him her friend, but it had come to this, that his step was as music in her ear, and the sunshine of his presence had glorified her days. How she had looked for his coming, with what quiet welcoming smiles she had received her friend; his silence had been as sweet to her as his

words ; the very seat where he sat, the very reels of cotton on her little work-table with which he had played, were as sacred as relics in her eyes.

How she had leant on his counsel ; his yea was ea to her, and his nay, nay. How wise and gentle he had ever been with her ; once she had been ill, and the tenderness of his sympathy had made her almost love her illness. " You must get well ; we cannot spare you," he had said to her, and she had thanked him with her sweetest smiles.

How happy they had been in those days : the hought of any change had terrified her ; sometimes he had imagined herself twenty years older, but Mildred Lambert still, with a grey-haired friend coming quietly across in the dusk to sit with her and Arnold when all the young ones were gone—her friend, always her friend !

How pitiable had been her self-deception ; she must have loved him even then. The thought of Margaret's husband marrying another woman, and that woman the girl that she had cherished as her own daughter, tormented her with a sense of impossibility and pain. Good heavens, what if he deceived himself ! What if for the second time in his life he worked out his own disappointment, passion and benevolence leading him equally astray.

Sadness indescribable and profound steeped the soul of this noble woman; pitiful efforts after prayer, wild searching for light, for her lost calmness, for mental resolve and strength, broke the silence of her anguish, but such a struggle could not long continue in one so meek, so ordinarily self-controlled; then came the blessed relief of tears; then, falling on her knees and bowed to the very dust, the poor creature invoked the presence of the Great Sufferer and laid the burden of her sorrow in the broken heart of her Lord.

One who loved Mildred found, long afterwards, a few lines copied from some books, and marked with a red marginal line, with the date of this night affixed:—

“ So out in the night on the wide, wild sea,
When the wind was beating drearily,
And the waters were moaning wearily,
I met with Him who had died for me.”

Had she met with Him? “ Had the wounded hand touched hers in the dark?” Who knows?

The lightnings ceased to play along the edges of the cloud, the moon rose, the long shadows projected from the hills, the sound of cattle hoofs came crisply up the dry channel of the beck, and still

Mildred knelt on, with her head buried on her outstretched arms. "I will not go unless Thou bless me"—was that her prayer?

Not in words, perhaps; but as the day broke, with faint gleams and tints of ever-broadening glory, Mildred rose from her knees, and looked over the hills with sad, steadfast eyes.

The conflict had ceased, the conqueror was only a woman—a woman no longer young, with pale cheeks, with faded, weary eyes—but never did braver hands gird on the cross that must henceforth be carried unflinchingly.

"Mine be the pain, and his the happiness," she whispered. Her knees were trembling under her with weakness, she looked wan and bloodless, but her soul was free at last. "I am innocent; I have done no wrong. God is my witness," she cried in her inmost heart. "I shall fear to look no man in the face. God bless him—God bless them both! He is still my friend, for I have done nothing to forfeit his friendship. God will take care of me. I have duty, work, blessings innumerable, and a future heaven when this long weariness is done."

And again: "He will never know it. He will never know that yesterday, as I stood by his side, I longed to be lying at the bottom of the dark,

sunless pool. It was a wicked wish—God forgive me for it. I saw him look at me once, and there was surprise in his eyes, and then he stretched out his kind hand and led me away."

And then once more : " There is no trouble unendurable but sin, and I thank my God that the shame and the terror has passed, and left me, weak indeed, but innocent as a little child. If I had known—but no, His Hand has been with me through it all. I am not afraid; I have not betrayed myself; I can bear what God has willed."

She had planned it all out. There must be no faltering, no flinching; not a moment must be unoccupied. Work must be found, new interest sought after, heart-sickness subdued by labour and fatigue; there was only idleness to be dreaded, so she told herself.

It has been often said by cynical writers that women are better actors than men; that they will at times play out a part in the dreary farce of life that is quite foreign to their real character, dressing their face with smiles while their heart is sore within them.

But Mildred was not one of these; she had been taught in no ordinary school of adversity. In the dimness of that seven years' seclusion she had learned

lessons of fortitude and endurance that would have baffled the patience of weaker women. Flesh and blood might shrink from the unequal combat, but her courage would not fail ; her strength, fed from the highest sources, would still be found sufficient.

Henceforth for Mildred Lambert there should shine the light of a day that was not "clear nor dark;" she knew that for her no dazzling sunrise of requited love should flood her woman's kingdom with brightness ; happiness must be replaced by duty, by the quiet contentment of a heart "at leisure from itself."

"There is no trouble unendurable but sin," she had said to herself. Oh, that other poor sufferers—sufferers in heart, in this world's good things—would lay this truth to their souls ! It would rob sorrow of its sting, it would lift the deadly mists from the charnel-house itself. For to the Mildreds of life religion is no Sunday garb, to be laid aside when the week-day burdens press heaviest ; no garbled mixture of sentiment and symbolic rites, of lip-worship and heart freedom, tolerated by "the civilised heathenism" of the present day, for in their heart they know that to the Christian suffering is a privilege, not a punishment ; that from the days of Calvary "Take up thy cross and follow Me"

is the literal command literally obeyed by the true followers of the great Master of suffering.

Mildred was resolved to tolerate no weakness ; she dressed herself quickly, and was down at the usual time. "How old and faded I look," she thought, as she caught the reflection of herself in the glass.

Her changed looks would excite comment, she knew, and she braced herself to meet it with tolerable equanimity ; a sleepless night could be pleaded as an excuse for heavy eyes and swollen eyelids. Polly indeed seemed disposed to renew her soft manipulations and girlish officiousness, but Mildred contrived to put them aside. "She was going down to the schools, and after that there were the old women at the workhouse and at Nateby," she said, with the quiet firmness which always made Aunt Milly's decrees unalterable. "Her girls must take care of themselves until she returned."

"Charity begins at home, Aunt Milly. I am sure Olive and I are worth a score of old women," grumbled Polly, who in season and out of season was given to clatter after Mildred in her little high-heeled shoes.

Dr. Heriot's ward was becoming a decidedly fashionable young lady ; the pretty feet were set off

by silver buckles, Polly's heels tapped the floor endlessly as she tripped hither and thither; Polly's long skirts, always crisp and rustling, her fresh dainty muslins, her toy aprons and shining ribbons, were the themes of much harmless criticism; the little hands were always faultlessly gloved; London-marked boxes came to her perpetually, with Roy's saucy compliments; wonderful ruby and cream-coloured ribbons were purchased with the young artist's scanty savings. Nor was Dr. Heriot less mindful of the innocent vanity that somehow added to Polly's piquancy. The little watch that ticked at her waist, the gold chain and locket, the girlish ring with its turquoise heart, were all the gifts of the kind guardian and friend.

Dr. Heriot's bounty was unfailing. The newest books found their way to Olive's and Mildred's little work-tables; Chriss was made happy by additions to her menagerie of pets; a grey parrot, a Skye terrier whose shaggy coat swept the ground, even pink-eyed rabbits found their way to the vicarage; the grand silk dresses that Dr. Heriot had sent down on Polly's last birthday for her and Olive were nothing in Chriss's eyes compared to Fritter-my-wig, who could smoke, draw corks, bark like a dog, and reduce Veteran Rag to desperation

by a vision of concealed cats on the stable wall. Chriss's oddities were not disappearing with her years, indeed she was still the same captious little person as of old ; with her bright eyes and tawny-coloured mane she was decidedly picturesque, though stooping shoulders, and the eye-glass her short-sight required, detracted somewhat from her good looks.

On any sunny afternoon she could be seen sitting on the low step leading to the lawn, her parrot, Fritter-my-wig, on her shoulder, and Tatters and Witch at her feet, and most likely a volume of Euripides on her lap. The quaint little figure, the red-brown touzle of curls, the short striped skirt, and gold eye-glasses, struck Roy on one of his rare visits home ; one of his most charming pictures was painted from the recollection. "There was an Old Woman," it was called. Chriss objected indignantly to the dolls that were introduced, though Roy gravely assured her that he had adhered to Hugh's beautiful idea of the twelve months.

Polly had some reason for her discontent and grumbling. The weather had changed, and heavy summer rains seemed setting in, and Mildred's plan for her day did not savour of prudence. It suited Mildred's sombre thoughts better than sunshine ;

she went upstairs almost cheerfully, and took out a grey cloak that was Polly's favourite aversion on the score that it reminded her of a Sister-of-Charity cloak. "Not that I do not love and honour Sisters," she had added by way of excuse, "but I should not like you to be one, Aunt Milly," and Mildred had hastened to assure her that she had never felt it to be her vocation.

She remembered Polly's speech now as she shook out the creases ; the straight, long folds, the unobtrusive colour, somehow suited her. "I think people who are not young ought always to dress in black or grey," she said to herself ; "butterfly colours are only fit for girls. I should like nothing better than to be allowed to hide all this hair under a cap and Quaker's bonnet." And yet, as she said this, Mildred remembered with a sudden pang that Dr. Heriot had once observed in her hearing that she had beautiful hair.

She went on bravely through the day, no work came amiss to her ; after a time she ceased even to feel fatigue. Once the crowded school-room would have made her head ache after the first hour or so, but now she sat quite passive, with the girls sewing round her, and the boys spelling out their tasks with incessant buzz and movement.

The old women in the workhouse did not tire her with their complaints ; she sat for a long time by the side of one old creature who was bedridden and palsied ; the idiot girl—alas ! she was forty years old—blinked at her with small dazed eyes, as she showed her the gaily-coloured pictures she had pasted on rag for her amusement, and followed her contentedly up and down the long whitewashed wards.

In the cottages she was as warmly welcomed as ever ; one sick child, whom she had often visited, held out his little arms and ceased crying with pain when he saw her. Mildred laid aside her damp cloak, and walked up and down the flagged kitchen for a long time with the boy's head on her shoulder, singing to him with her low sweet voice.

“ Ay, but he's terrible fond of you, poor thing,” exclaimed the mother gratefully. She was an invalid too, and lay on a board beside the empty fireplace, looking out of the low latticed window crowded with flower-pots. The other children gathered round her, plucking her skirt shyly, and listening to Mildred's cooing voice ; the little fellow's blue eyes seemed closing drowsily, one small blackened hand stole very near Mildred's neck.

"There is a home for little children above the bright blue sky," sang Mildred.

"Ay, Jock ; but, thoo lile varment, thoo'll nivver gang oop if thou bealst like a bargeist," whispered the woman to a white-headed urchin beside her, who seemed disposed for a roar.

"I cares lile—nay, I dunn't," muttered Jock, contumaciously ; to Jock's unregenerated mind the white robes and the palms seemed less tempting than the shouts of his little companions outside. "There's lile Geordie and Dawson's Sue," he grumbled, rubbing his eyes with his dirty fists.

"Gang thee thy ways, or I'll fetch thee a skelp wi' my stick," returned the poor mother, weary of the discussion, and Jock scampered off, nothing loth.

Mildred sang her little hymn all through as the boy's head drooped heavily on her shoulder ; as she walked up and down, her dreamy eyes had a far-off look in them, and yet nothing escaped her notice. She saw the long rafter over her head, with the Sunday boots and shoes neatly arranged on it, with bunches of faint-smelling herbs hanging below them ; the adjoining door was open, the large bare room, with its round table and bedstead, and heaped up coals on the floor, was plainly visible to

her, as well as its lonely occupant darning black stockings in the window.

"After all, was she as lonely," she thought, "as Bett Hutchinson, who lived by herself, with only a tabby cat for company, and kept her coal-cellar in her bedroom? and yet, though Bett had weak eyes and weak nerves, and was clean out of her wits on the subject of the boggle family, from the 'boggle with twa heeds' down to Jock's 'bargheist ahint the yat-stoop.'"

Bett's superstition was a household word with her neighbours, "daft Bett and her boggles" affording a mine of entertainment to the gossips of Nateby. Mildred, and latterly Hugh Marsden, had endeavoured to reason Bett out of her fancies, but it was no use. "I saw summut—nay, nay, I saw summut," she always persisted. "I was a'most daft—'twas t'boggle, and nought else," she murmured.

Mildred was no weak girl, to go moaning about the world because her heart must be emptied of its chief treasure. Bett's penurious loneliness read her a salutary lesson; her own life, saddened as it was, grew rich by comparison. "'If in mercy Thou wilt spare joys that yet are mine,'" she whispered, as she laid the sleeping child down in

the wooden cot and spread the patched quilt lovingly over him.

Jock grinned at her from behind an oyster-shell and mud erection ; like Geordie and Dawson's Sue were with him. "Aw've just yan hawpenny left," she heard him say as she passed.

Mildred had finished the hardest day's work that she had ever done in her life, but she knew that it was not yet over. Dr. Heriot was not one to linger over a generous impulse ; "If it is worth doing at all, one should do it at once," was a favourite maxim of his.

Mildred knew well what she had to expect. She was only thankful that the summer's dusk allowed her to slip past the long French window that always stood open. They were lighting the lamp already—some one, probably Olive, had asked for it. A voice, that struck Mildred cold with a sudden anguish, railed playfully against bookworms who could not afford a blind-man's holiday.

"He is here ; of course I knew how it would be," she murmured, as she groped her way a little feebly up the stairs. She would have given much for a quiet half-hour in her room, but it was not to be ; the tapping sound she dreaded already struck upon her ear, the crisp rustle of garments in the

passage, then the faint knock and timid entrance. "I knew it was Polly. Come in; do you want me, my dear?" the tired voice striving bravely after cheerfulness.

"Aunt Milly—oh, Aunt Milly!—I thought you would never come; and in the dark two soft little hands clasped her tight, and a burning face hid itself in her neck. "Oh," with a sort of gasp, "I have wanted my Aunt Milly so badly!"

Then the noble, womanly heart opened with a great rush of tenderness, and took in the girl who had so unconsciously become a rival.

"What is this, my pet—not tears, surely?" for Polly had laid her head down, and was sobbin hysterically with excitement and relief.

"I cannot help it. I was wanting all the time for papa to know; and then it was all so strange, and I thought you would never come. I shall be more comfortable now," sobbed Polly, with a girlish abandon of mingled happiness and grief. "Directly I heard your step outside the window I made an excuse to get away to you."

"I ought not to have left you—it was wrong; but, no, it could not be helped," returned Mildred, in a low voice. She presséed the girl to her, and

stroked the soft hair with cold, trembling fingers. "Are those happy tears, my pet? Hush, you must not cry any more now."

"They do me good. I felt as though I were some one else downstairs, not Polly at all. Oh, Aunt Milly, can you believe it?—do you think it is all real?"

"What is real? You have told me nothing yet, remember. Shall I guess, Polly? Is it a great secret—a very great secret, my darling?"

"Aunt Milly, as though you did not know, when he told me that you and he had had a long talk about it yesterday!"

"He—Dr. Heriot, I suppose you mean?"

"He says I must call him something else now," returned the girl in a whisper, "but I have told him I never shall. He will always be Dr. Heriot to me—always. I don't like his other name, Aunt Milly; no one does."

"John—I think it beautiful!" with a certain sharp pain in her voice. She remembered how he had once owned to her that no one had called him by this name since he was a boy. He had been christened John Heriot—John Heriot Heriot—and his wife had always called him Heriot. "Only my

mother ever called me John," he had said in a regretful tone, and Mildred had softly repeated the name after him.

"It has always been my favourite name," she had owned with that simplicity that was natural to her; and his eyes had glistened as though he were well-pleased.

"It is beautiful; it reminds one of St. John. I have always liked it," she said a little quickly.

"His wife called him Heriot; yes, I know, he told me—but I am so young, and he—well, he is not exactly old, Aunt Milly, but—"

"Do you love him, Polly?—child, do you really love him?" and for a moment Mildred put the girl from her with a sort of impatience and irritation of suspense. Polly's pretty face was suffused with hot blushes when she came back to her place again.

"He asked me that question, and I told him yes. How can one help it, and he so good? Aunt Milly, you have no idea how kind and gentle he ~~was~~ was when he saw he frightened me."

"Frightened you, my child?"

"The strangeness of it all, I mean. I could not ~~not~~ understand him for a long time. He talked quite ~~in~~ in his old way, and yet somehow he was different ~~in~~ and all at once I found out what he meant."

" Well ? "

" And then I got frightened, I suppose. I thought how could I satisfy him, and he so much older and cleverer. He is so immeasurably above all my girlish silliness, and so I could not help crying a little."

" Poor little Polly ! but he comforted you."

" Oh, yes," with more blushes, " he talked to me so beautifully that I could not be afraid any more. He said that for years this had been in his mind, that he had never forgotten how I had wanted to live with him and take care of him, and how he had always called me ' his sweet little heartsease ' ever since. Oh, Aunt Milly, I know he wants me. It was so sad to hear him talk about his loneliness."

" You will not let him be lonely any longer. I have lost my Polly, I see."

" No, no, you must not say so," throwing her arm round her, only with a sort of bashful pride, very new in Polly ; " he has no one to take care of him but me."

" Then he shall have our Sunbeam—God bless her ! " and Mildred kissed her proudly. " I hope you did not tell him he was old, Polly."

" He asked me if I thought him so, and of course I said it was only I that was too young."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He laughed, and said it was a fault that I should soon mend, but that he meant to be very proud as well as fond of his child-wife. Do you know, he actually thinks me pretty, Aunt Milly."

"He is right; you are pretty—very pretty, Polly," she repeated, absently. She was saying in her own heart "Dr. Heriot's wife—John Heriot's child-wife"—over and over again.

"Roy never would tell me so, because he said it would make me vain. Roy will be glad about this, will he not, Aunt Milly?"

"I do not know; nay, I hope so, my darling."

"And Richard, and all of them; they are so fond of Dr. Heriot. Do you remember how often they have joked him about Heriot's Choice?"

"Yes, I remember."

A sudden spasm crossed Mildred's gentle face, but she soon controlled herself. She must get used to these sharp pangs, these recollections of the happy, innocent past; she had misunderstood her friend, that was all.

"Dear Aunt Milly, make me worthier of his love," whispered the girl, with tears in her eyes—"he is so noble, my benefactor, my almost father—"

and now he is going to make me his wife, and I am so young and childish."

And she clung to Mildred, quivering with vague irrepressible emotion.

"Hush, you will be his sunbeam, as you have been ours. What did he call you—his heartsease? You must keep that name, my pet."

"But—but you will teach me, he thinks so much of you; he says you are the gentlest, and the wisest, and the dearest friend he has ever had. Where are you going, Aunt Milly?" for Mildred had gently disengaged herself from the girl's embrace.

"Hush, we ought to go down; you must not keep me any longer, dear Polly; he will expect—it is my duty to see him."

Mildred was adjusting her hair and dress with cold, shaking fingers, while Polly stood by and shyly helped her.

"It does not matter how you look," the girl had said, with innocent unconscious sarcasm; "you are so tired, the tumbled grey alpaca will do for to-night."

"No, it does not matter how I look," replied Mildred, calmly.

A colourless weary face and eyes with an odd shine and light in them were reflected between the dimly-burning candles. Polly stood beside her slim and conscious ; she had dried her tears, and a sweet honest blush mantled her young cheeks. The little foot tapped half impatiently on the floor.

" You have no ribbons or flowers, but perhaps after all it will not be noticed," she said, with pardonable egotism.

" No, he will have only eyes for you to-night. Come, Polly, I am ready ;" and as the girl turned coy and seemed disposed to linger, Mildred quietly turned to the door.

" I thought I was to be dismissed without your saying good night to me," was Dr. Heriot's greeting as he advanced to meet them. He was holding Mildred's cold hand tightly, but his eyes rested on Polly's downcast face as he spoke.

" We ought to have come before, but I knew you would understand."

" Yes, I understand," he returned, with an expression of proud tenderness. " You will give your child to me, Miss Lambert ? "

" She has always seemed to belong to you more than to me," and then she looked up at him for a moment with her old beautiful smile. " I need

not ask you to be good to her, you are good to every one; but she is so young, little more than a child."

" You may trust me," he returned, putting his arm gently round the young girl's shoulders; " there shall not a hair of her head suffer harm if I can prevent it. Polly is not afraid of me, is she?"

" No," replied Polly, shyly; but the bright eyes lifted themselves with difficulty.

She looked after him with a sort of perplexed pride, half-conscious, half-confused, as he released her and bade them all good-night. When he was gone she hovered round Mildred in the old childish way and seemed unwilling to leave her.

" I have done the right thing. Bless her sweet face. I know I shall make her happy," thought Dr. Heriot as he walked with rapid strides across the market-place; " a man cannot love twice in his life as I loved my Margaret, but the peaceful affection such as I can give my darling will satisfy her I know. If only Philip could see into my heart to-night I think he would be comforted for his motherless child." And then again—" How sweetly Mildred Lambert looked at me to-night; she is a good woman, there are few like her. Her face reminded me of some Madonna I have seen

in a foreign gallery as she stood with the girl clinging to her. I wonder she has never married; these ministering women lead lonely lives sometimes. Sometimes I have fancied she knew what it is to love, and suffered. I thought so yesterday and again to-day, there was such a ring of sadness in her voice. Perhaps he died, but one cannot tell, women never reveal these things."

And so the benevolent heart sunned itself in pleasant dreams. The future looked fair and peaceful, no brooding complications, no murky clouds threatened the atmosphere, passion lay dormant, rest was the chief good to be desired. Could benevolence play him false, could affection be misplaced, would he ever come to own to himself that delusion had cheated him, that husks and not bread had been given him to eat, that his honest yearning heart had again betrayed him, that a kindly impulse, a protecting tenderness, had blinded him to his true happiness?

"How good he is," thought the young girl as she laid her head on the pillow; "how dearly I must love him: I ought to love him. I never imagined any one could be half so gentle. I wonder if Roy will be glad when I tell him—oh yes, I wonder if Roy will be glad?"

CHAPTER XI.

“AND MAIDENS CALL IT LOVE-IN-IDLENESS.”

“ Is there within thy heart a need
That mine cannot fulfil ?
One chord that any other hand
Could better wake or still ?
Speak now, lest at some future day
My whole life wither and decay.”

Adelaide Anne Proctor.

THE news of Dr. Heriot’s engagement soon spread fast ; he was amused, and Polly half frightened, by the congratulations that poured upon them. Mr. Trelawny, restored to something like good humour by the unexpected tidings, made surly overtures of peace, which were received on Dr. Heriot’s part with his usual urbanity. The Squire imparted the news to his daughter after his own ungracious fashion.

“ Do you hear Heriot’s gone and made a fool of himself ? ” he said, as he sat facing her at table ; “ he has engaged himself to that ward of his ; why, he is twenty years older than the girl if he is a day ! ”

"Papa, do you know what you are saying?" expostulated Ethel; the audacity of the statement bewildered her; she would have scorned herself for her credulity if she had believed him. Dr. Heriot—their Dr. Heriot! No, she would not so malign his wisdom.

The quiet scepticism of her manner excited Mr. Trelawny's wrath.

"You women all set such store by Heriot," he returned, sneeringly; "everything he did was right in your eyes; you can't believe he would be caught like other men by a pretty face, eh?"

"No, I cannot believe it," she returned, still firmly.

"Then you may go into the town and hear it for yourself," he continued, taking up his paper with a pretence of indifference, but his keen eyes still watched her from beneath it. Was it only her usual obstinacy, or was she really incredulous of his tidings? "I had it from Davidson, who had congratulated the Doctor himself that morning," he continued, sullenly; "he said he never saw him look better in his life; the girl was with him."

"But not Polly—you cannot mean Polly Ellison?" and now Ethel turned strangely white.

"Papa, there must be some mistake about it all.
I—I will go and see Mildred."

"You may spare yourself that trouble," returned Mr. Trelawny, gloomily.

Ethel's changing colour, her evident pain, were not lost upon him. "There may be a chance for Cathcart still," was his next thought; "women's hearts as well as men are often caught at the rebound; she'll have him out of pique—who knows?" and softened by this latter reflection he threw down his paper, and continued almost graciously—

"Yes, you may spare yourself that trouble, for I met Miss Lambert myself this afternoon."

"And you spoke to her?" demanded Ethel, with almost trembling eagerness.

"I spoke to her, of course; we had quite a long talk, till she said the sun was in her eyes, and walked on. She seemed surprised that I had heard the news already, said it was so like Kirkby Stephen gossip, but corroborated it by owning that they were all as much in the dark as we were; but Miss Ellison being such a child, no one had thought of such a thing."

"Was that all she said? Did she look as well as usual? I have not seen her for nearly a

fortnight, you know," answered Ethel, apologetically.

"I can't say I noticed. Miss Lambert would be a nice-looking woman if she did not dress so dowdily; but she looked worse than ever this morning," grumbled the Squire, who was a *connaisseur* in woman's dress, and had eyed Mildred's brown hat and grey gingham with marked disfavour. "She said the sun made her feel a little faint, and then she sent her love to you and moved away. I think we might as well do the civil and call at the vicarage this afternoon; we shall see the bride-elect herself then," and Ethel, who dared not refuse, agreed very unwillingly.

The visit was a trying ordeal for every one concerned. Polly indeed looked her prettiest, and blushed very becomingly over the Squire's laboured compliments, though, to do him justice, they were less hollow than usual; he was too well pleased at the match not to relapse a little from his frigidity.

"You must convince my daughter—she has chosen to be very sceptical," he said, with a side-long look at Ethel, who just moved her lips and coloured slightly. She had kissed Polly in her ordinary manner, with no special effusion, and

added a quiet word or two, and then she had sat down by Mildred.

"Polly looks very pretty and very happy, does she not?" asked Mildred after a time, lifting her quiet eyes to Ethel.

"I beg your pardon—yes, she looks very nice," returned Ethel, absently. "I suppose I ought to say I am glad about this," she continued with some abruptness as Mildred took up her work again, and sewed with quick even stitches, "but I cannot; I am sorry, desperately sorry. She is a dear little soul, I know, but all the same I think Dr. Heriot has acted foolishly."

"My dear Ethel,—hush, they will hear you!" The busy fingers trembled a little, but Mildred did not again raise her eyes.

"I do not care who hears me; he is just like other men. I am disappointed in him; I will have no Mentor now but you, Mildred."

"Dr. Heriot has done nothing to deserve your scorn," returned Mildred, but her cheek flushed a little. Did she know that instinctively Ethel had guessed her secret, that her generous heart throbbed with sympathy for a pain which, hidden as it was, was plainly legible to her clear-sightedness? "We

ought all to be glad that he has found comfort at last," she said, a little unsteadily.

Ethel darted a singular look at her, admiring, yet full of pain.

" I am not so short-sighted as you. I am sorry for a good man's mistake—for it is a mistake, whatever you may say, Mildred. Polly is pretty and good, but she is not good enough for him. And then, he is more than double her age!"

" I thought that would be an additional virtue in your eyes," returned Mildred, pointedly. She was sufficiently mistress of herself and secure enough in her quiet strength to be able to retaliate in a gentle womanly way. Ethel coloured and changed her ground.

" They have nothing in common. She is nice; but then she is not clever ; you know yourself that her abilities are not above the average, Mildred."

" Dr. Heriot does not like clever women, he has often said so ; Olive would not suit him at all."

" I never thought of Olive," in a piqued voice. Ethel was losing her temper over Mildred's calmness. " I am aware plain people are not to his taste."

" No, Polly pleases him there ; and then, she is so sweet."

"I should have thought him the last man to care for insipid sweetness," began Ethel, stormily, but Mildred stopped her with unusual warmth.

"You are wrong there; there is nothing insipid about Polly; she is bright, and good, and true-hearted; you undervalue his choice when you say such things, Ethel. Polly's extreme youthfulness and gaiety of spirits have misled you."

"How lovingly you defend your favourite, Mildred; you shall not hear another word in her disparagement. What does he call her? Mary?"

"No, Polly; but I believe he has plenty of pet names for her."

"Yes, he will pet her—ah, I understand, and I am not to scorn him. I am not to call him foolish, Mildred?"

"Of course not. Why should you?"

"Ah, why should I? Papa, it is time for us to be going; you have talked to Miss Ellison long enough. My pretty bird," as Polly stole shyly up to them, "I have not wished you joy yet, but it is not always to be had for the wishing."

"I wish every one would not be so kind," stammered Polly. Mr. Trelawny's condescension and elaborate compliments had almost overwhelmed the poor little thing.

"How the child blushes! I wonder you are not afraid of such a grave Mentor, Polly."

"Oh, no, he is too kind for that—is he not, Aunt Milly?"

"I hope you do not make Mildred the umpire," replied Ethel, watching them both. "Oh, these men!" she thought to herself, as she dropped the girl's hand; her eyes grew suddenly dim as she stooped and kissed Mildred's pale cheek. "Good—there is no one worthy of you," she said to herself; "he is not—he never will be now."

"People are almost too kind; I wish they would not come and talk to me so," Polly said, with one of her pretty pouts, as she walked with Dr. Heriot that evening. He was a little shy of courting in public, and loved better to have her with him in one of their quiet walks; this evening he had come again to fetch her, and Mildred had given him some instruction as to the length and duration of their walk.

"Had you not better come with us?" he had said to her, as though he meant it; but Mildred shook her head with a slight smile. "We shall all meet you at Ewbank Scar; it is better for you to have the child to yourself for a little," she had replied.

Polly wished that Aunt Milly had come with them after all. Dearly as she loved her kind guardian and friend, she was still a little shy of him ; a consciousness of girlish incompleteness, of undeveloped youth, haunted her perpetually. Polly was sufficiently quick-witted to feel her own deficiencies. How should she ever be able to satisfy him ? she thought. Aunt Milly could talk so beautifully to him, and even Olive had brief spasms of eloquence. Polly felt sometimes as she listened to them as though she were craning her neck to look over a wall at some unknown territory with strange elevations and giddy depths, and wide bridgeless rivers meandering through it.

Suppositions, vague imaginations, oppressed her ; Polly could talk sensibly in a grave matter-of-fact way, and at times she had a pretty *piquante* language of her own ; but Chriss's erudition, and Olive's philosophy, and even Mildred's gentle sermonising, were wearying to her. "I can talk about what I have seen and what I have heard and read," she said once, "but I cannot play at talk—make believe—as you grown-up children do. I think it is hard," continued practical Polly, "that Aunt Milly, who has seen nothing, and has been shut up in a sick-room all the best years of her life,

can spin yards of talk where I cannot say a word." But Dr. Heriot found no fault with his young companion; on the contrary, Polly's *naïveté* and freshness were infinitely refreshing to the weary man, who, as he told himself, had lived out the best years of his life. He looked at her now as she uttered her childish complaint. One little gloved hand rested on his arm, the other held up the long skirts daintily, under the broad-brimmed hat a pretty oval face dimpled and blushed with every word.

"If people would only not be so kind—if they would let me alone," she grumbled.

"That is a singular grievance, Polly," returned Dr. Heriot, smiling; "happiness ought not to make us selfish."

"That is what Aunt Milly says. Ah, how good she is!" sighed the girl, enviously; "almost a saint. I wish I were more like her."

"I am satisfied with Polly as she is, though she is no saint."

"No, are you really?" looking up at him brightly. "Do you know, I have been thinking a great deal since—you know when——" her colour giving emphasis to her unfinished sentence.

"Indeed? I should like to know some of those

thoughts," with a playful glance at her downcast face. "I must positively hear them, Polly. How sweet and still it is this evening. Suppose we sit and rest ourselves for a little while, and you shall tell me all about them."

Polly shook her head. "They are not so easy to tell," she said, looking very shy all at once. Dr. Heriot had placed her on a stile at the head of the little lane that skirted Podgill; the broad sunny meadow lay before them, gemmed with trefoil and Polly's favourite eyebright; blue gentian, and pink and white yarrow, and yellow ragwort wove straggling colours in the tangled hedgerows; the graceful campanilla, with its bell-like blossoms, gleamed here and there, towering above the lowlier rose-campion, while meadowsweet and trails of honeysuckle scented the air.

Dr. Heriot leant against the fence with folded arms; his mood was sunny and benignant. In his grey suit and straw hat he looked young, almost handsome. Under the dark moustache his lip curled with an amused, undefinable smile.

"I see you will want my help," he said, with a sort of compassion and amusement at her shyness. Whatever she might own, his little fearless Polly was certainly afraid of him.

"I have tangled them dreadfully," blushed Polly; "the thoughts, I mean. Every night when I go to bed I wish—I wish I were as wise as Aunt Milly, and then perhaps I should satisfy you."

"My dear child!" and then he stopped a little, amazed and perplexed. Why was Mildred Lambert's goodness to be ever thrust on him, he thought, with a man's natural impatience? He had not bent his neck to her mild sway; her friendship was very precious to him—one of the good things for which he daily thanked God; but this innocent harping on her name fretted him with a vague sense of injury. "Polly, who has put this in your head?" he said; and there was a shadow of displeasure in his tone, quiet as it was.

"No one," she returned, in surprise; "the thought has often come to me. Are you never afraid," she continued, timidly, but her young face grew all at once sweet and earnest—"are you not afraid that you will be tired—dreadfully tired—when you have only me to whom to talk?"

Then his gravity relaxed: the speech was so like Polly,—so like his honest, simple-minded girl.

"And what if I were?" he repeated, playing with her fears.

"I should be so sorry," she returned, seriously. "No, I should be more than sorry; I think it would make me unhappy. I should always be trying to get older and wiser for your sake; and if I did not succeed I should be ready to break my heart. No, do not smile," as she caught a glimpse of his amused face; "I was never more serious in my life."

"Why, Mary, my little darling, what is this?" he said, lifting the little hand to his lips; for the bright eyes were full of tears now.

"No, call me Polly—I like that best," she returned, hurriedly. "Only my father called me Mary; and from you——"

"Well, what of me, little one?"

"I do not know. It sounds so strange from your lips. It makes me feel afraid, somehow, as though I were grown up and quite old. I like the childish Polly best."

"You shall be obeyed, dear—literally and entirely, I mean;" for he saw her agitation needed soothing. "But Polly is not quite herself to-night; these fears and scruples are not like her. Let me hear all these troublesome thoughts, dearest; you know I am a safe confidant." And encouraged by the gentleness of his tone, Polly crept close into the

shelter of the kind arm that had been thrown round her.

" I don't think it hurts one to have fears," she said, in her simple way ; " they seem to grow out of one's very happiness. You must not mind if I am afraid at times that I shall not always please you ; it will only be because I want to do it so much."

" There, you wound and heal in one breath," he replied, half-laughing and half-touched.

" It has come into my mind more than once that when we are alone together ; when I come to take care of you ; you know what I mean."

" When you are my own sweet wife—I understand, Polly ;" and now nothing could exceed the grave tenderness of his voice.

" Yes, when you bring me home to the fireside, which you say has been so lonely," she returned, with touching frankness, at once childlike and womanly. " When you have no one but me to comfort you, what if you find out too late that I am so young—so very young—that I have not all you want ? "

" Polly—my own Polly ! "

" Ah, you may call me that, and yet the disappointment may be bitter. You have been so good to me, I love you so dearly, that I could not bear—

to see a shade on your face, young as I am. I do not feel like a child about this."

"No, you are not a child," he returned, looking at her with new reverence in his eyes. In her earnestness she had forgotten her girlish shyness; her hands were clasped fearlessly on his arm, truth was written on her guileless face, her words rang in his ear with mingled pathos and purity.

"No, you are not a child," he repeated, and then he stopped all of a sudden; his wooing had grown difficult to him. He had never liked her so well, he had never regarded her with such proud fondness, as now, when she pleaded with him for toleration of her undeveloped youth. For one swift instant a consciousness of the truth of her words struck home to him with a keen sense of pain, marring the pleasant harmony of his dream; but when he looked at her again it was gone.

And yet how was he to answer her? It was not petting fondness she wanted—not even ordinary love-speeches—only rest from an uneasy fear that harassed her repose—an assurance, mute or otherwise, that she was sufficient for his peace. If he understood her aright, this was what she wanted.

"Polly, I do not think you need to be afraid," he said at last, hesitating strangely over his words.

" I understand you, my darling ; I know what you mean ; but I do not think you need be afraid."

" Ah, if I could only feel that ! " she whispered.

" I will make you feel it ; listen to me, dear. We men are odd, unaccountable beings ; we have moods, our work worries us, we have tired fits now and then, nothing is right, all is vanity of vanity, disgust, want of success, blurred outlines, opaque mist everywhere—then it is I shall want my little comforter. You will be my veritable Sunbeam then."

" But if I fail you ? "

" Hush, you will never fail me. What heresy, what disbelief in a wife's first duty ! Do you know, Polly, it is just three years since I first dreamt of the beneficent fairy who was to rise up beside my hearth."

" You thought of me three years ago ? "

" Thought of you ? No, dreamt of you, fairy. You know you came to me first in a ladder of motes and beams. Don't you remember Dad Fabian's attic, and the picture of Cain, and the strange guardian coming in through the low doorway ? "

" Yes, I remember ; you startled me."

" Polly is a hundred times prettier now ; but I can recognise still in you the slim creature in the

rusty black frock, with thin arms, and large dark eyes, drinking in the sunlight. It was such a forlorn Polly then."

"And then you were good to me."

"I am afraid I must have seemed stern to you, poor child, repelling your young impulse in such a manner. I remember, while you were pleading in your innocent fashion, and Miss Lambert was smiling at you, that a curious fancy came into my head. Something hardly human seemed to whisper to me, 'John Heriot, after all, you may have found a little comforter.'"

"I am so glad. I mean that you have thought of me for such a time." Polly was dimpling again ; the old happy light had come back to her eyes.

"You see it is no new idea. I have watched my Polly growing sweeter and brighter day by day. How often you have confided in me ; how often I have shared your innocent thoughts. You were not afraid to show me affection then."

"I am not now," she stammered.

"Perhaps not now, my bright-eyed bird ; you have borrowed courage and eloquence for the occasion, inciting me to all manner of lover-like and foolish speeches. What do you say, little one—do you think I play the lover so badly, after all ?"

"Yes—no—it does not suit you, somehow," faltered Polly, truthful still.

"What, am I too old?" but Dr. Heriot's tone was piqued in spite of its assumed railery.

"No, you know you are not; but I like the old ways and manners best. When you talk like this I get shy and stupid, and do not feel like Polly at all."

"You are the dearest and sweetest Polly in the world," he returned, with a low, satisfied laugh; "the most delightful combination of quaintness and simplicity. I wonder what wise Aunt Milly would say if she heard you."

"That reminds me that she will be expecting us," returned Polly, springing off the stile without waiting for his hand. She had shaken off her serious mood, and chatted gaily as they hurried along the upper woodland path; her hands were full of roses and great clusters of campanilla by the time they reached Mildred, who was sitting on a little knoll that overlooked the Scar. In winter-time the Beck rushed noisily down the high rocky face of the cliff, but now the long drought had dried up its sources, and with the exception of a few still pools the river-bed was dry.

Mildred sat with her elbow on her knee, looking

dreamily at the grey scarped rock and overhanging vegetation ; while Olive and Chriss scrambled over the slippery boulders in search of ferns. Behind the dark woods the sunset clouds were flaming with breadths of crimson and yellow glory. Over the barren rocks a tiny crescent moon was rising ; Mildred's eyes were riveted on it.

"We have found some butterwort and kingcups. Dr. Heriot declares it is the same that Shakespeare calls 'Winking Mary-buds.' You must add it to your wild-flower collection, Aunt Milly."

"Are you tired of waiting for us, Miss Lambert ? Polly has been giving me some trouble, and I have had to lecture her."

"Not very severely, I expect," returned Mildred. She looked anxiously from one to another, but Polly's gaiety reassured her as she flung a handful of flowers into her lap, and then proceeded to sort and arrange them.

"You might give us Perdita's pretty speech, Polly," said Dr. Heriot, who leant against a young thorn watching her.

Polly gave a mischievous little laugh. She remembered the quotation ; Roy had so often repeated it. He would spout pages of Shakespeare as they walked through the wintry woods. "You

have brought it upon yourself," she cried, holding up to him a long festoon of gaudy weeds, and repeating the lines in her fresh young voice.

"Here's flowers for you !
Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram ;
The marigold, that goes to bed with the sun,
And with him rises weeping : these are flowers
Of middle summer, and I think they are given
To men of middle age. You are very welcome."

"Oh, Polly—Polly—fie !"

"Little Heartsease, do you know what you deserve ?" but Dr. Heriot evidently enjoyed the mischief. "After all, I brought it on myself. I believe I was thinking of the crazy Danish maid, Ophelia, all the time."

"You have had your turn," answered Polly, with her prettiest pout; "my next shall be for Aunt Milly. I am afraid I don't look much like Ophelia, though There, Aunt Milly—there's rosemary, that's for remembrance — pray you, love, remember ; and there is pansies, that's for thoughts."

"Make them as gay as your own, Heartease;" then—

"Hush, don't interrupt me ; I am making Aunt Milly shiver. 'There's fennel for you and columbines ; there's rue for you, and here's some for me.

We may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. You may wear your rue with a difference.' "

" You are offering me a sorry garland ; " and Mildred forced a smile over the girl's quaint conceit. " Mints, savory, marjoram, all the homeliest herbs you could find in your garden. I shall not forget the compliment to my middle age," grumbled Dr. Heriot, who was unusually tickled at the goodness of the *repartee*. Polly was never so thoroughly at her ease as when she was under Aunt Milly's wing. Just then Mildred rose to recall Olive and Chriss ; as she went down the woody hillock a quick contraction of pain furrowed her brow.

" There's rue for you," she said to herself ; " ah, and rosemary, that's for remembrance. Oh, Polly, I felt tempted to use old Polonius' words, and say 'there's a method in madness ; ' how little you know the true word spoken in jest ; never mind, if I can only take it as ' my herb of grace o' Sundays,' it will be well yet."

Mildred found herself monopolised by Chriss during their homeward walk. Polly and Dr. Heriot were in front, and Olive, as was often her custom, lingering far behind.

" Let them go on, Aunt Milly," whispered Chriss, " lovers are dreadfully poor company to

every one but themselves. Polly will be no good at all now she is engaged."

"What do you know about lovers, a little girl like you?" returned Mildred, amused in spite of herself.

"I am not a little girl, I am nearly sixteen," replied Chriss, indignantly. "Romeo and Juliet were all very well, and so were Ferdinand and Miranda, but in real life it is so stupid. I have made up my mind that I shall never marry."

"Wait until you are asked, puss."

"Ah, as to that," returned the young philosopher, calmly, "as Dr. John says, it takes all sorts of people to make up a world, and I dare say some one will be found who does not object to eyeglasses."

"Or to Blues," observed Mildred, rather slyly.

"You forget we live in enlightened days—" remarked Chriss, sententiously; "this sort of ideas belonged to the Dark Ages. Minds are not buried alive now because they happen to be born in the feminine gender," continued Chriss, with a slight confusion of metaphor.

Mildred smiled. Chriss's odd talk distracted her from sad thoughts. The winding path had

already hidden the lovers from her ; unconsciously she slackened her pace.

"I should not mind a nice grey professor, perhaps, if he knew lots of languages, and didn't take snuff. But they all do ; it clears the brain, and is a salutary irritant," went on Chriss, who had only seen one professor in her life, and that one a very dingy specimen. "I should like my professor to be old and sensible, and not young and silly, and he must not care about eating and drinking, or expect me to sew on his buttons, or mend his gloves. Some one ought to invent a mending-machine. I am sure these things take away half the pleasure of living."

"My little Chriss, do you mean to be head without hands ? You will be a very imperfect woman, I am afraid, and I hope in that case you will not find your professor."

"I would rather be without him, after all," replied Chriss, discontentedly. "Men are so stupid ; they want their own way, and every one has to give in to them. I would rather live in lodgings like Roy, somewhere near the British Museum, where I could go and read every day, and in the evening I would go to lectures and

concerts, or stop at home and play with Fritter — — my-wig : that is just the sort of life I should like, — — Aunt Milly."

" What is to become of your father and me ? — — Perhaps Olive may marry."

" Olive ? not a bit of it. She always says — — nothing would induce her to leave papa. You — — don't want me to stop all my life in this little — — corner of the world, where everything is behind — — the times, and there is not a creature to whom on — — cares to speak ? "

" Chriss, Chriss, what a radical you are," — — turned Mildred. She was a little weary of Chriss — 's childish chatter. They were in the deep lane skirting Podgill now ; just beyond the foot-bridge Polly and Dr. Heriot were standing waiting — — for them.

" Is the tangle all gone ? " he asked, presently.
" Are you quite happy again, Heartsease ? "

" Yes, very happy," she assured him, with a bright smile, and he felt a pressure of the hand that rested on his arm.

" What a darling she is," he thought to himself somewhat later that night, as he walked across the market-place, now shining in the moonlight.
" Little witch, how prettily she acted that speech

of Perdita, her eyes imploring forgiveness all the time for her mischief. The child has deep feelings too. Once or twice she made me feel oddly. But I need not fear, she will make a sweet wife, I know, my innocent Polly."

But the little scene haunted his fancy, and he had an odd dream about it that night. He thought that they were in the grassy knoll again looking over the Scar, and that some one pushed some withered herbs into his hands. "Here's rue for you, and there's some for me; you may wear your rue with a difference," said a voice.

"Unkind Polly!" he returned, dropping them, and stretched out his arms to imprison the culprit; but Polly was not there, only Mildred Lambert was there, with her elbow on her knee, looking sadly over the Scar.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DESERTED COTTON-MILL IN HILBECK GLEN.

“ Hey the green ribbon ! we kneeled beside it,
We parted the grasses dewy and sheen ;
Drop over drop, there filtered and滑ed
A tiny bright beck that trickled between.
Tinkle, tinkle, sweetly it sung to us,
Light was our talk as of faëry bells—
Faëry wedding-bells faintly rung to us
Down in their fortunate parallels.”

Jean Ingelow.

RICHARD came home for a few days towards the end of the long vacation. He was looking pale and thin in spite of his enforced cheerfulness, and it was easy to see that the inaction of the last few weeks had only induced restlessness, and a strong desire for hard, grinding work, as a sedative for mental unrest. His brotherly congratulations to Polly were mixed with secret amusement.

“ So you are ‘ Heriot’s choice,’ are you, Polly ? ” he said, taking her hand kindly, and looking at the happy, blushing face.

“ Are you glad, Richard ? ” she whispered, shyly.

" I can hardly tell," he returned, with a curiously perplexed expression. " I believe overwhelming surprise was my first sensation on hearing the wonderful intelligence. I gave such an exclamation that Roy turned quite pale, and thought something had happened at home, and then he got in a temper, and carried off the letter to read by himself ; he would have it I was chaffing him."

Polly pouted half-seriously. " You are not a bit nice to me, Richard, or Roy either. Why has he never written to me himself ? He must have got my two letters."

" You forget ; I have never seen anything of him for the last six weeks. Fancy my finding him off on the tramp when I returned that night, prosecuting one of his art pilgrimages, as he calls them, to some shrine of beauty or other. He had not even the grace to apologise for his base desertion till a week afterwards. However, Frognal without Rex was not to be borne ; so I started off to Cornwall in search of our reading party, and then got inveigled by Oxenham, who carried me off to Ilfracombe."

" It was very wrong of Rex to leave you ; he is not generally so thoughtless," returned Polly, who had been secretly chagrined by this neglect on the

part of her old favourite. "Is there no letter from Rex?" had been a daily question for weeks.

"Rex is a regular Bohemian since he took to wearing a moustache and a velvet coat. All the Hampstead young ladies are breaking their hearts over him. He looks so handsome and picturesque; if he would only cut his hair shorter, and open his sleepy eyes, I should admire him myself."

Polly sighed.

"I wish he would come home, dear old fellow.— I long to see him; but I am dreadfully angry— with him, all the same; he ought to have written— to Dr. Heriot, if not to me. It is disrespectful— unkind—not like Rex at all." And Polly's bright— eyes swam with tears of genuine resentment.

"I shall tell Roy how you take his unkindnes— to heart."

She shook her head.

"It is very ungrateful of him, to say the least — of it. You have spoiled him, Polly."

"No," she returned, very gravely. "Rex is too good to be spoiled; he must have some reason for his silence. If he had told me he was going to be married—to—to any of those young ladies you mention, I would have gone to London barefoot to see his wife. I know," she continued, softer,

"Rex was fonder of me than he was of Olive and Chriss. I was just like a favourite sister, and I always felt as though he were my own—own brother. Why there is nothing that I would not do for Rex."

"Dear Polly, we all know that; you have been the truest little sister to him, and to us all."

"Yes, and then for him to treat me like this—to be silent six whole weeks. Perhaps he did not like Aunt Milly writing. Perhaps he thought I ought to have written to him myself; and I have since—two long letters."

"Dr. Heriot will be angry with Rex if he sees you fretting."

"I am not fretting; I never fret," she returned, indignantly; "as though that foolish boy deserved it. I am happier than I can tell you. Oh, Richard, is he not good?"

And there was no mistaking the sweet, earnestness with which she spoke of her future husband.

"Ah, that he is."

"How grave you look, Richard! Are you really glad—really and truly, I mean?"

"Why, Polly, what a little Jesuit you are, diving into people's secret thoughts in this way." And there was a shadow of embarrassment in

Richard's cordial manner. "Of course I am glad that you should be happy, dear, and not less so that Dr. John's solitary days are over."

"Yes, but you don't think me worthy of him," she returned, plaintively, and yet shrewdly.

"I don't think you really grown up, you mean; you wear long dresses, you are quite a fashionable young lady now, but to me you always seem little Polly."

"Rude boy," she returned, with a charming pout, "one would think you had grey hairs, to listen to you. I can't be so very young or so very silly, or he would not have chosen me, you know."

"I suppose you have bewitched him," returned Richard, smiling; but Polly refused to hear any more, and ran away laughing.

Richard's face clouded over his thoughts when he was left alone. Whatever they were he kept them locked in his own breast; during the few days he remained at home, he was observant of all that passed under his eyes, and there was a deferential tenderness in his manner to Mildred that somewhat surprised her; but neither to her nor to any other person did he hint that he was disappointed by Dr. Heriot's choice.

During the first day there had been no mention of Kirkleatham or Ethel Trelawny, but on the second day Richard had himself broken the ice by suggesting that Mildred should contrive some errand that should take her thither, and that in the course of her visit she should mention his arrival at the vicarage.

"I must think of her, Aunt Milly; we are neither of us ready to undergo the awkwardness of a first meeting. Perhaps in a few months things may go on much as usual. I always meant to write to her before my ordination. Tell her that I shall only be here for a few days—that Polly wants me to wait over her birthday, but that I have no intention of intruding on her."

"Are you so sure she will regard it as an intrusion?" asked Mildred, quietly.

"There is no need to debate the question," was the somewhat hasty reply. "I must not deviate from the rule I have laid down for myself, to see as little as possible of her until after my ordination."

"And that will be at Whitsuntide?"

"Yes," he returned, with an involuntary sigh; "so, Aunt Milly, you will promise to go after dinner?"

Mildred promised, but fate was against her.

Olive and Polly had driven over to Appleby with Dr. Heriot, and relays of callers detained her unwillingly all the afternoon ; she saw Richard was secretly chafing, as he helped her to entertain them with the small talk usual on such occasions. He was just bidding a cheerful good-bye to Mrs. Heath and her sister, when horses' hoofs rung on the beck gravel of the courtyard, and Ethel rode up to the door, followed by her groom.

Mildred grew pale from sympathy when she saw Richard's face, but there was no help for it now ; she saw Ethel start and flush, and then quietly put aside his assistance, and spring lightly to the ground ; but she looked almost as white as Richard himself when she came into the room, and not all her dignity could hide that she was trembling.

" I did not know, I thought you were alone," she faltered, as Mildred kissed her ; but Richard caught the whisper.

" You shall be alone if you wish it," he returned, trying to speak in his ordinary manner, but failing miserably.

Poor lad, this unexpected meeting with his idol was too much even for his endurance. " I was not prepared for it," as he said afterwards. He thought she looked sweeter than ever under the

influence of that girlish embarrassment. He watched her hungrily as she stood still holding Mildred's hand.

" You shall not be made uncomfortable, Miss Trelawny ; it is my fault, not yours, that I am here. I told Aunt Milly to prevent this awkwardness. I will go, and then you two will be alone together ; " and he was turning to the door, but Ethel's good heart succoured them both and prevented months of estrangement.

" Why should you go, Richard ? this is your home, not mine ; Mildred, ask him not to do anything so strange—so unkind."

" But if my presence embarrasses you ? " he returned, with an impetuous *Cœur-de-Lion* look which made Ethel blush.

She could not answer.

" It will not do so if you sit down and be like yourself," said Mildred, pleadingly. She looked at the two young creatures with half-pitying, half-amused eyes. Richard's outraged boyish dignity and Ethel's yearning overture of peace to her old favourite—it was beautiful and yet sad to watch them, she thought. " Richard, will you ring that bell, please ? " continued the wary woman ; " Ethel has come for her afternoon cup of tea, and she does

not like to be kept waiting. Tell Ary to be quick, and fetch me some of her favourite seed-cake from the dining-room sideboard."

Mildred's common sense was rarely at fault ; to be matter-of-fact at such a crisis was invaluable. It restored Richard's calmness as nothing else could have done ; it gave him five minutes' grace, during which he hunted for the cake and his mislaid coolness together ; that neither could be found at once mattered little. Richard's over-charged feelings had safe vent in scolding Ary and creating commotion and hubbub in the kitchen, where the young master's behests were laws fashioned after the Mede and Persian type.

When he re-entered the room Mildred knew she could trust him. He found Ethel sitting by the open window with her hat and gauntlets off, enjoying the tea Mildred had provided. He carried the cake gravely to her, as though it were a mission of importance, and Ethel, who could not have swallowed a mouthful to save her life, thanked him with a sweet smile and crumbled the fragments on her plate.

By and by Mildred was called away on business. She obeyed reluctantly when she saw Ethel's appealing look.

"I shall only be away a few minutes. Give her some more tea, Richard," she said as she closed the door.

Richard did as he was bid, but either his hand shook or Ethel's, though neither owned to the impeachment, but the cup slipped and some of the hot liquid was spilt on the blue cloth habit.

The laugh that followed was a very healing one. Richard was on his knees trying to undo the mischief and blaming himself in no measured terms for his awkwardness. When he saw the sparkle in Ethel's eye his brow cleared like magic.

"You are not angry with me, then?"

"Angry with you! What an idea, Richard; such a trifling accident as that. Why it has not even hurt the cloth."

"No, but it has scalded your hand; let me look." And as Ethel tried to hide it he held it firmly in his own.

"You see it is nothing, hardly a red spot!" but he did not let it go.

"Ethel, will you promise me one thing? No, don't draw your hand away, I shall say nothing to frighten you. I was a fool just now, but then one is a fool sometimes when one comes suddenly upon the woman one loves. But will you promise not to

shun me again, not as though you hated me, I mean?"

"Hated you! For shame, Richard."

"Well, then, as though you were afraid of me. You disdained my assistance just now, you would not let me lift you from your horse. How often have I done so before, and you never repulsed me!"

"You ought not to have noticed it, you ought to have understood," returned Ethel, with quivering lips. It was very sweet to be talking to him again if only he would not encroach on his privilege.

"Then let things be between us as they always have been," he pleaded. "I have done nothing to forfeit your friendship, have I? I have humbled myself, not you," with a flavour of bitterness which she could not find it in her heart to resent. "Let me see you sitting here sometimes in my father's house; such a sight will go far to soothe me. Shall it be so, Ethel?"

"Yes, if you wish it," she returned, almost humbly.

Her only thought was how she should comfort him. Her womanly eyes read signs of conflict and suffering in the pale, wan face; when she had said so, he relinquished her hand with a mute clasp of thanks. He looked almost himself when Mildred

came back, apologising for her long delay. Had she really been gone half-an-hour—neither of them knew it. Ethel looked soothed, tranquillised, almost happy, and Richard not graver than his wont.

Mildred was relieved to find things on this agreeable footing, but she was not a little surprised when two days afterwards Richard announced his intention of going up to Kirkleatham, and begged her to accompany him.

“I will promise not to make a fool of myself again ; you shall see how well I shall behave,” he said, anticipating her remonstrance. “Don’t raise any objection, please, Aunt Milly. I have thought it all over, and I believe I am acting for the best,” and of course Richard had his way.

Ethel’s varying colour when she met them testified to her surprise, and for a little while her manner was painfully constrained, but it could not long remain so. Richard seemed determined that she should be at her ease with him. He talked well and freely, only avoiding with the nicest tact any subject that might recall the conversation in the kitchen garden.

Mildred sat by in secret admiration and wonder ; the simple woman could make nothing of the

young diplomatist. That Richard could talk well on grave subjects was no novelty to her ; but never had he proved himself so eloquent ; rather terse than fluent, addicted more to correctness than wit, he now ranged lightly over a breadth of subjects, touching gracefully on points on which he knew them to be both interested, with an admirable choice of words that pleased even Ethel's fastidiousness.

Mildred saw that her attention was first attracted, and then that she was insensibly drawn to answer him. She seemed less embarrassed, the old enthusiasm woke. She contradicted him once in her old way, he maintained his opinion with warm persistence ;—they disagreed. They were still in the height of the argument when Mildred looked at her watch and said they must be going.

It was Ethel's turn now to proffer hospitality, but to her surprise Richard quietly refused it. He would come again and bid her good-bye, he said gravely, holding her hand ; he hoped then that Mr. Trelawny would be at home.

His manner seemed to trouble Ethel. She had stretched out her hand for her garden-hat. It had always been a custom with her to walk down the

croft with Mildred, but now she apparently changed her mind, for she replaced it on the peg.

"You are right," said Richard, quietly, as he watched this little by-play, "it is far too hot in the crofts, and to-day Aunt Milly has my escort. Old customs are sometimes a bore even to a thorough conservative such as you, Miss Trelawny."

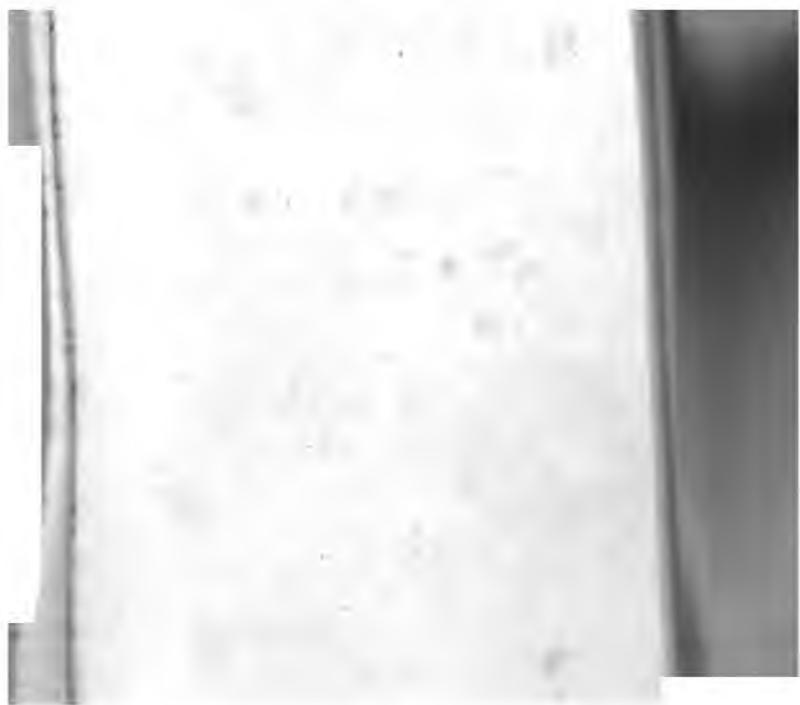
"I will show you that you are wrong," returned Ethel, with unusual warmth, as the broad-brimmed hat was in her hand again. There was a pin-point of sarcasm under Richard's smooth speech that grazed her susceptibility.

Perhaps Richard had gained his end, for an odd smile played round his mouth as he walked beside her. He did not seem to notice that she did not address him again, but confined her attention to Mildred. Her cheeks were very pink, possibly from the heat, when she parted from them at the gate, and Richard got only a very fleeting pressure of the hand.

"Richard, I do not know whether to admire or to be afraid of you," said Mildred, half in jest, as they crossed the road.

A flash of intelligence answered her.

"Did I behave well? It is weary work, Aunt



Milly ; it will make an old man of me before my time, but she shall reverence me yet," and his mouth closed with the old determined look she knew so well.

Dr. Heriot had planned a picnic to Hillbeck in honour of Polly's eighteenth birthday, the vicarage party and Mr. Marsden being the only guests.

Hillbeck Wood was a very favourite place of resort on hot summer days. To-day dinner was to be spread in the deep little glen lying behind an old disused cotton-mill, a large dilapidated building that Polly always declared must be haunted, and to please this fancy of hers Dr. Heriot had once fabricated a weird plot of a story which was so charmingly terrible, as Chriss phrased it, that the girls declared nothing would induce them to remain in the glen after sundown.

There was certainly something weird and awesome in the very silence and neglect of the place, but the glen behind it was a lovely spot. The hill-sides were thickly wooded, through the bottom of the glen ran a sparkling little beck, the rich colours of the foliage, wearing now the golden and red livery of autumn, were warm and harmo-

nious, while a cloudless sky and a soft September air brightened the scene of enjoyment.

Mildred, who, as usual on such occasions, was doomed to rest and inaction, amused herself with collecting a specimen of *ruta muraria* for her fernery, while Polly and Chriss washed salad in the running stream, and Richard and Hugh Marsden unpacked the hampers, and Olive spread the tempting contents on dishes tastefully adorned with leaves and flowers under Dr. Heriot's supervision, while Mr. Lambert sat by an amused spectator of the whole.

There was plenty of innocent gaiety over the little feast. Hugh Marsden's blunders and large-handed awkwardness were always provocative of mirth, and he took all in such good part. Polly and Chriss waited on everybody, and even washed the plates in the beck, Polly tucking up her fresh blue cambric and showing her little high-heeled shoes as she tripped over the grass.

When the meal was over the gentlemen seemed inclined to linger in the pleasant shade; Chriss was clamouring Dr. Heriot for a story, but he was too lazy to comply, and only roused himself to listen to Richard and Hugh Marsden, who had got



on the subject of clerical work and the difficulty of contesting northern prejudice.

"Their ignorance and hard-headedness are lamentable," groaned Hugh; "dissent has a terrible hold over their mind; but to judge from a few of the stories Mr. Delaware tells us, things are better than they were."

"My father met with a curious instance of this crass ignorance on the part of one of his parishioners about fifteen years ago," returned Richard. "I have heard him relate it so often. You remember old W——, father?"

"I am not likely to forget him," replied Mr. Lambert, smiling. "It was a very pitiful case to my mind, though one cannot forbear a smile at the quaintness of his notion. Heriot has often heard me refer to it."

"We must have it for Marsden's benefit then."

"I think Richard was right in saying that it was about fifteen years ago that I was called to minister to an old man in his eighty-sixth year, who had been blind from his birth, I believe, and was then on his death-bed. I read to him, prayed for him, and talked to him; but though his lips moved I did not seem to gain his attention. At last, in

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continued Mr. Lambert, "but many of my older brethren have curious stories to tell of their parishioners, all of them rather amusing than otherwise. Your predecessor, Heriot—Dr. Bailey—had a rare stock of racy anecdotes, with which he used to entertain us on winter evenings over a glass of hot whisky toddy."

"To which he was slightly too much addicted," observed Dr. Heriot.

"Well, well, we all have our faults," replied the vicar, charitably. "We will not speak against poor Bailey, who was in the main a downright honest fellow, though he was not without his weakness. Betha used to remonstrate with him sometimes, but it was no use; he said he was too old to break off a habit. I don't think, Heriot, he ever went to great lengths."

"Possibly not," was the somewhat dry reply, "but we are willing to be amused by the old doctor's reminiscences."

"You know the old Westmorland custom for giving names; well, some forty years ago George Bailey, then a young doctor new to practice, was sent for to visit a man named John Atkinson, who lived in a house at the head of Swale-dale.

“ Having reached the place, he knocked at the door, and asked if John Atkinson lived there.

“ ‘ Nay,’ says the woman, ‘ we’ve naebody ev that nyam hereaboots.’

“ ‘ What?’ says Bailey, ‘ nobody of the name in the dale?’

“ ‘ Nyah,’ was the reply, made with the usual phlegm and curtness of the genuine Daleswoman. ‘ There’s naebody ev that nyam.’

“ ‘ Well, it is very odd,’ returned Bailey, in great perplexity. ‘ This looks like the house to which I was directed. Is there any one ill in the dale?’

“ ‘ Bless me, bairn,’ exclaimed the woman, ‘ ye’ll mean lile Geordie John. He’s my man; en’s liggen en theyar,’ pointing to an inner room, ‘ varra badly. Ye’ll be t’dotor, I warn’t. Cum, cum yer ways in en see him. Noo I think on’t, his reet nyam is John Atkinson, byt he allus gas by lile Geordie John. His fad’r was Geordie, ye kna, an’ nobbut a varra lile chap.’ ”

“ Capital!” observed Dr. Heriot, as he chuckled and rubbed his hands over this story. “ Bailey told it with spirit, I’ll be bound. How well you have mastered the dialect, Mr Lambert.”

"I made it my study when I first came here. Betha and I found a fund of amusement in it. Have you ever noticed, Heriot, there is a dry, heavy sort of wit—a certain richness and appropriateness of language employed by some of these Dalesmen, if one severs the grain from the rough husk?"

"They are not wanting in character or originality certainly, though they are often as rugged as their own hills. I fancy Bailey had lived among them till he had grown to regard them as the finest people and the best society in the world."

"I should not wonder. I remember he told me once that he was called to a place in Orton to see an elderly man who was sick. 'Well, Betty,' he said to the wife, 'how's Willy?'

"'Why,' says Betty, 'I nau'nt; he's been grumbling for a few days back, and yesterday he tyak his bed. I thout I'd send for ye. He mebbe git'nt en oot heat or summat; byt gang ye in and see him.' The doctor having made the necessary examination came out of the sick-room, and Betty followed him.

"'Noo, doctor, hoo div ye find him?'

"'Well, Betty, he's very bad.'

"'Ye dunnot say he's gangen t'dee?'

“‘ Well,’ returned Bailey, reluctantly, ‘ I think it is not unlikely ; to my thinking he cannot pull through.’

“‘ Oh, dear me,’ sighed Betty, ‘ poor auld man. He’s ben a varra good man t’me, en I’ll be wa to looses him, byt we mun aw gang when oor time cumms. Ye’ll cum agen, doctor, en deeah what ye can for hym. We been lang t’gither, Willy an’ me, that ha’ we.’

“ Well, Bailey continued his visits every alternate day, giving no hope, and on one Monday apprising her that he thought Willy could not last long.

“ Tuesday was market - day at Penrith, and Betty, who thought she would have everything ready, sent to buy meat for the funeral dinner.

“ On Wednesday Bailey pronounced Willy rather fresher, but noticed that Betty seemed by no means glad ; and this went on for two or three visits, until Betty’s patience was quite exhausted, and in answer to the doctor’s opinion that he was fresher than he expected to have seen him and might live a few days longer, she exclaimed—

“‘ Hang leet on him ! He allus was maist purvurse man I ivver knew, an wad nobb’t du as he wod ! Me at ’ll aw be spoilt this het weather.’

"‘Never mind,’ said Bailey, soothingly, ‘you can buy some more.’

“‘Buy mair, say ye?’ she returned, indignantly. ‘I’ll du nowt o’t mack, he mud ha deet when he shapt on’t, that mud he, en hed a dinner like other fok, but noo I’ll just put him by wi’ a bit breead an cheese.’

“As a matter of fact, the meat was spoilt, and had to be buried a day or two before the old man died.”

Hugh Marsden’s look of horror at the conclusion of the vicar’s anecdote was so comical that Dr. Heriot could not conceal his amusement; but at this moment a singular incident put a check to the conversation.

For the last few minutes Polly had seemed unusually restless, and directly Mr. Lambert had finished, she communicated in an awe-stricken whisper that she had distinctly seen the tall shadow of a man lurking behind the wall of the old cotton-mill, as though watching their party.

“I am sure he is after no good,” continued Polly. “He looks almost as tall and shadowy as Leonard in Dr. Heriot’s story; and he was crouching just as Leonard did when the phantom of the headless maiden came up the glen.”

Of course this little sally was received with shouts of laughter, but as Polly still persisted in her incredible story, the young men declared their intention of searching for the mysterious stranger, and as the girls wished to accompany them, the little party dispersed across the glen.

Mildred, who was busy with one of the maids in clearing the remnants of the feast and choosing a place where they should boil their gipsy kettle, heard every now and then ringing peals of laughter mixed with odd braying sounds.

Chriss was the first to reappear.

"Oh, Aunt Milly," she exclaimed breathlessly, "what do you think Polly's mysterious Leonard has turned out to be? Nothing more or less than an old donkey browsing at the head of the glen. Polly will never hear the last of it."

"Leonard - du - Bray 'In a bed of thistles,'" observed Richard, mischievously. "Oh, Polly, what a mare's nest you have made of it."

Polly looked hot and discomposed; the laugh was against her, and to put a stop to their teasing, Mildred proposed that they should all go up to the Fox Tower as they had planned, while she stayed behind with her brother.

"We will bring you back some of the shield and

bladder fern," was Chriss's parting promise. Mildred watched them climbing up the wooded side of the glen, Dr. Heriot and Polly first, hand-in-hand, and Olive following more slowly with Richard and Hugh Marsden ; and then she went and sat by her brother, and they had one of their long quiet talks, till he proposed strolling in the direction of the Fox Tower, and left her to enjoy a solitary half-hour.

The little fire was burning now. Ary, in her picturesque red petticoat and blue-serge dress, was gathering sticks in the thicket; the beck flowed like a silver thread over the smooth grey stones; the sunset clouds streaked the sky with amber and violet; the old cotton-mill stood out grey and silent.

Mildred, who felt strangely restless, had strolled to the mill, and was trying to detach a delicate little spray of ivy frond that was strongly rooted in the wall, when a footstep behind her made her start, and in another moment a shadow drew from a projecting angle of the mill itself.

Mildred rose to her feet with a smothered exclamation half of terror and surprise, and then turned pale with a vague presentiment of trouble. The figure behind her had a velvet coat and fair mous-

tache, but could the white haggard face and blood-shot eyes belong to Roy ?

“ Rex, my dear Roy, were you hiding from us ? ”

“ Hush, Aunt Milly, I don’t want them to see me. I only want you.”

END OF VOL. II.



